

# THE SUCCESSION CRISIS IN RUSSIA

October 28-November 10, 1996

# IN THESE TIMES

## Health Insurance Claim Form

Send complete form to:  
F.U. Insurance Company

666 Greedy Boulevard  
Despicable, Illinois 685

Please print or type clearly

Notice to all parties completing this form

It is fraudulent to fill out this form with information you  
know to be false. Please save the lying to us. Thanks.

I.D. Number

GROUP NUMBER

IDENTIFICATION NUMBER

GULLIBILITY RATE:

Patient (church) for information

PATIENT'S FULL LEGAL NAME LAST, FIRST, MIDDLE INITIAL

SEX

DATE OF BIRTH

Member (church) information

MEMBER (POLICY HOLDER) NAME

SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER

DATE OF BIRTH

Claim information

ACCIDENT?

Other Insurance

**HOW THE INSURANCE INDUSTRY  
HAS STYMIED HEALTH CARE REFORM**

\$2.50/CANADA \$3.00



**Ramón Castellblanch on**

**THE KASSEBAUM-KENNEDY BILL**

**Colin Gordon on**

**CLINTON'S FAILED PLAN**



# E D I T O R I A L

## WHY AMERICANS HATE POLITICS

**A**mong those who have followed the presidential campaign, it's hard to find anyone who isn't appalled by Clinton's and Dole's rhetorical vacuity. A few Beltway pundits blather on about which one has scored more points, won or lost the debates, or presented a more palatable image. But even those who are normally blind to the superficiality of political discourse as we've come to know it say they are uneasy about this year's campaign. Some even worry about what it portends for the future of our political system.

Most media commentators, however, see two trees and miss the forest. Generally, they blame the candidates themselves. They write or talk about Clinton's lack of principle, his slippery expediency and the tawdriness of his personal life. And they write about Dole's sour image, the ersatz tax-cut scheme he adopted after decades of ridiculing it, and his lack of vision and program.

But the problem goes much deeper than the weaknesses of these particular candidates. It is the result of a political system in which individuals have become the main focus of attention and in which parties, more and more, are mere vessels for their ambition.

Of course, personal characteristics have always been an important determinant of popular support for national leaders, especially here in the United States, where presidents are elected directly by the people rather than by members of the majority party—as would be the case if we had a parliamentary system. But before the television age, presidential candidates more often than not emerged on the national scene through a process of participation in their party's life and activities. Presidential hopefuls were nominated at conventions with the votes of local party leaders, lesser elected officials and active members. More often than not, the candidates represented the majority tendencies within their parties and, at least in part, were beholden to them.

But since the post-Watergate reforms of the early '70s,

the worst aspects of our national electoral system have flourished. As party control of the nominating process declined, the ability of individual candidates to raise money for television advertising became supreme. In 1992, Ross Perot exemplified the problem in its purest form. A political novice without qualifications beyond a monstrous ego, he became a major candidate simply because he was a billionaire willing to spend tens of millions of dollars of his fortune to promote himself. Obviously, if you have as much money as Perot does, you can run for any office without regard to party affiliation or support.

But, you may say, Perot is an aberration. It's true that not many politicians have millions to spend on their own behalf. That simply means that presidential aspirants must be willing to do whatever is necessary to get others to foot the bill. In other words, they must sell themselves to the highest bidders, as both Clinton and Dole have done throughout their political careers.

As candidates, Clinton and Dole cannot totally ignore their core constituents, but neither can they seriously offend their wealthy sponsors. That bind leads to the kind of campaign that we have been witnessing this year. The larger problems facing our nation—increasing job insecurity, declining real wages and income, children living in poverty, inadequate and increasingly costly health insurance, increasing disparity of income and wealth, pollution and environmental degradation—cannot be seriously addressed by our presidential candidates. To do so would offend their bankrollers. Yet they have to say something that resonates with the experience of a majority of the electorate. Thus, they conduct endless polls and focus groups to find the personal concerns of potential voters, so that these can be pandered to as a substitute for public policy proposals that might address the broader issues.

This is a system in which the truly smarmy have a great advantage. To end up on top, a person must not only be ruthlessly ambitious, but also willing to compromise core principles.

The American people instinctively understand this. That's why the quality of our national leaders has steadily declined since the end of World War II. Politics without vital parties has produced the corruption of public life that we now see. And parties once marked by a vibrant clash of principles and the honest espousal of interests are today bureaucratic shams. That explains why larger and larger numbers of Americans don't want any part of it.

2

# IN THESE TIMES

"...with liberty and justice for all"

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# LETTERS

## Chain letter

Regarding Mandy Stadtmiller's report on the "Survival of the biggest" (September 30), I'm pleased to read that "the real threat to the independents ... comes not from the Navaskys of the world." I also agree with Shakespeare & Co.'s owner, Bill Kurland, who is reported to have said that "I'm not sure that a better bookstore should be a cafe." I'm not sure either, although one of the better meals I've had in the Midwest was at the Table of Contents, the cafe attached to the excellent Hungry Mind bookstore in St. Paul, Minn.

Since Stadtmiller is kind enough to quote the opening of my *Times* op-ed piece, I will end by taking the liberty of quoting my close, which was the point of the piece. After noting that as the independents disappear the chains will in all probability try to increase their profits by dumbing down, I end with a paradox: "The best way to keep the

chains on course is to patronize and strengthen the independents—shops like Gotham Book Mart in New York, City Lights Bookstore in San Francisco, Hungry Mind in St. Paul. And yes, the original Shakespeare & Co. in Paris. Such bookshops are, as Shakespeare once wrote about the heart's true place, 'my home of love. If I have rang'd, like him that travels, I return again.' "

Victor Navasky

Publisher and Editorial Director  
*The Nation*  
New York City

## Keep that woman

I want to express my appreciation for Linda DeLibero's work. I first became aware of DeLibero with her review of *Dead Man Walking* (February 19). Reading it was revelation: passionate, disappointed, caring, involved, appropriately finger-pointing but not ultimately condemning. I did not like

the film as much as many viewers, it is true, so it is natural that I should react favorably to a review (one of the very few) that asserted the nakedness of the emperor, as it were.

But she moves on and on, and her writing just never ceases to impress. I've just finished reading her review of bell hooks' *Reel to Real* (September 30), and DeLibero has let me feel her agreement, sorrow, disagreement, disappointment, admiration and hopes for hooks without ever standing on high in judgment. I have been informed, enlightened and entertained about both of them.

Keep that woman—and don't ever forget to pay her. I look for her the way I used to look for Diana Johnstone in your pages and for Penny Lernoux and theater reviews in *The Nation*. And while I'm at it, I think Salim Muwakkil is extraordinary.

Ellen Simer

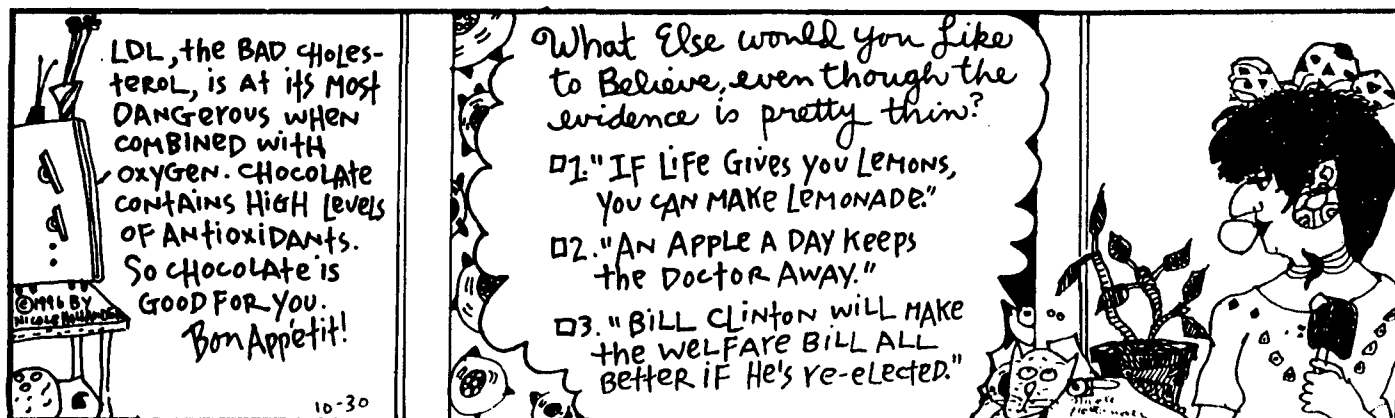
Zurich, Switzerland

## Losing the drug war

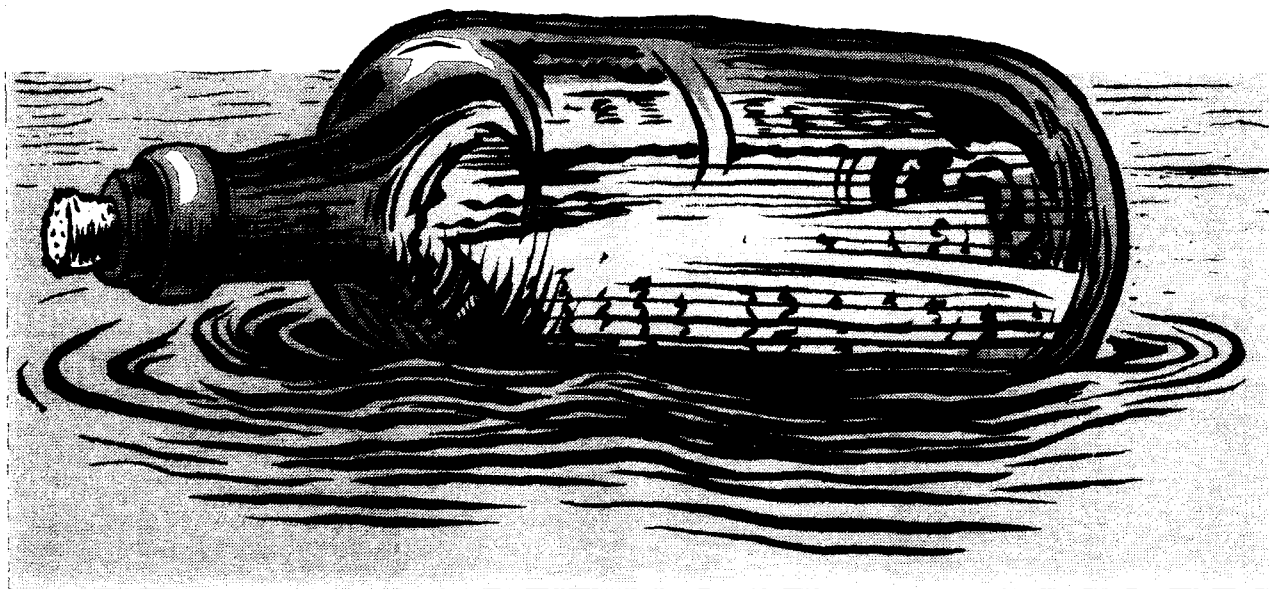
In "High on denial" (September 30), Bill Walker says that "legalization does not adequately address the social environment that has nurtured the drug culture." But the social environment he speaks of is in part a consequence of the drug war and not drug use per se. This is the central distinction that both prohibitionists and agnostic drug warriors fail to recognize again and again. Legalization is not a

SYLVIA

by Nicole Hollander







panacea. But as a radical legalizer, and author of a forthcoming book on the subject, I believe the solution to the drug problem requires the elimination of the drug war altogether. Let's put an end to the illegal drug syndicates first and then address the social environment that has been degraded by decades of prohibition.

Walker writes that "expectations about individual responsibility are only as sound as the social environment in which they arise." True. But to what degree can a heroin injector be responsible when he can't be sure if the needle he just borrowed is tainted with the HIV virus or if the heroin he's about to inject is laced with an animal tranquilizer? This is not to ignore the social conditions that drive people to use heroin and other drugs excessively. But let's worry about these reasons *after* legalization. In the meantime, health and crime issues cannot be adequately addressed in a milieu of illegality and criminality.

Barry Lyons  
New York City

## Talking Turkey

While I found James Ciment's article on the Kurds ("Useful victims," September 30) very informative, I would

like to take issue with one point that he made—that "the United States chose to go after targets in southern Iraq rather than in the north, where Hussein's supposed aggression occurred."

In fact, the United States had little choice in the matter. Bombing northern Iraq was ruled out by Turkish officials, who "said publicly before we even asked, that we could not use Incirlik in any action against the Iraqis," according to a U.S. official quoted in the *Washington Post*. It was a humiliating rejection, especially for those U.S. officials who have been testifying for years before Congress that Turkey was strategically too important for the United States to exert any effective pressure with regard to human rights violations or the continuing occupation of Cyprus.

Some have tried to blame the rejection on Necmettin Erbakan, Turkey's new Islamic prime minister; in fact, the decision was almost certainly made by the Turkish military. When U.S. and Turkish interests coincide, Turkey will serve U.S. purposes. But when they do not, Turkey will look after her own interests first. It's time that Pentagon officials stopped fooling themselves.

A. Rice  
Great Falls, Va.

## Sign me up!

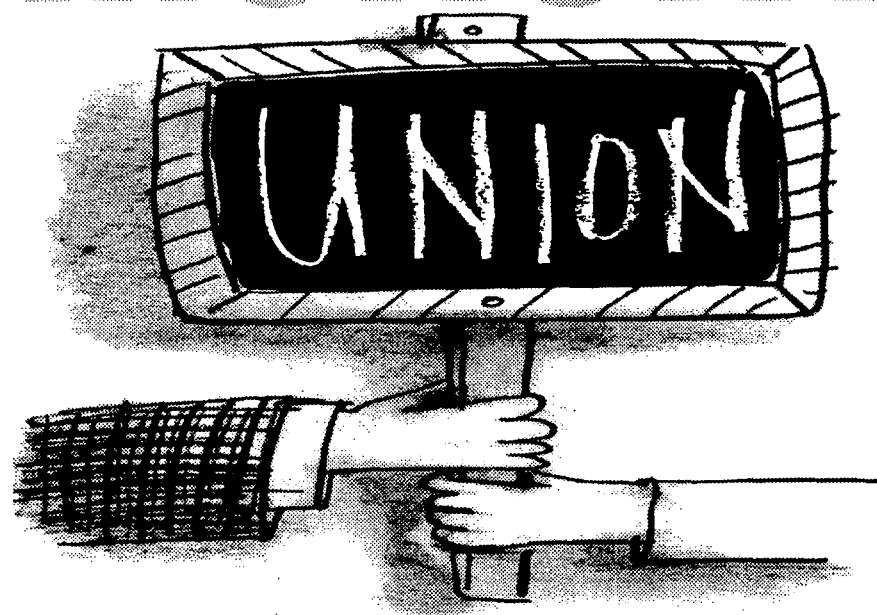
Kim Phillips' contention in "Papa don't preach" (September 16) that the federal government is a better husband and father than members of the race of mortal men is so persuasive and so promising as a political platform that progressives should waste no time in conveying the idea to blue-collar families across the nation. I propose that Ms. Phillips lead the way. When she reports back on the warm reception her ideas receive, others will no doubt want to join her crusade.

Joe Willingham  
Berkeley, Calif.

*Kim Phillips replies: Maybe Joe Willingham would like to join me as we go into the heartland, talking to blue-collar women about high-quality public day care, paid year-long family leave, and—who knows?—maybe even an entitlement program serving all new mothers. He might be surprised at the response.*

**Editor's note:** Please try to keep letters under 250 words in length. Otherwise we may have to make drastic cuts, which may change what you wished to say. Also, if possible, please type and double-space letters—or at least write clearly and with wide margins.

# InSHORT



## LABOR AND ACADEMIE COZY UP

**S**hortly after John Sweeney's opposition ticket was elected to lead the AFL-CIO last year, Houghton Mifflin editor Steve Fraser and University of Virginia historian Nelson Lichtenstein sent a letter congratulating the new leaders and expressing interest in building a new coalition between labor and intellectuals. This month's "teach-in with the labor movement," held at

Columbia University and other campuses across the country, was the first project to emerge from that offer of mutual support.

On October 3, more than 1,000 unionists, students and academics packed shoulder to shoulder in Columbia's Low Library (and hundreds more waited outside) to hear Sweeney call academia to an alliance.

In plenaries and workshops the next day, scholars, writers and labor advocates talked about such issues as globalization, unions and racial justice, and "organizing the university."

Most of the speakers seemed to agree that if progressives in academia and the labor movement really are to bridge the gulf that separates them, both would have to make some changes. Academics, declared feminist writer Betty Friedan, must "transcend identity politics" and "wake up from deconstruction" if they are to begin to address broader social justice issues. Historian Eric Foner pointed out that "most intellectuals have been servants of the powerful, not critics." Stanley Aronowitz, one of the teach-in organizers, noted that the issue of class is increasingly pressing itself into academia, with students facing an uncertain economic future and professors becoming tenureless temps.

For their part, labor unions must, in the words of author and professor Manning Marable, "recognize the legitimacy of struggles of people of color, of women, of grass-roots movements." Welfare-rights advocate Frances Fox Piven, *Nation* columnist Katha Pollitt and Columbia law professor Patricia Williams argued forcefully that the labor movement has to make common cause with poor people, particularly with mothers who have been vilified for needing public assistance. Piven took labor leaders to task for their halfhearted opposition to the recent welfare bill, noting that "the safety net under the poor was a floor on wages for everyone."

Some labor activists complained that the teach-in itself didn't succeed in

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## Corporations without borders

OF THE WORLD'S 100 LARGEST ECONOMIES, 51 ARE TRANSNATIONAL CORPORATIONS, ACCORDING TO *THE TOP 200: The Rise of Global Corporate Power*, a report for the Institute for Policy Studies by Sarah Anderson and John Cavanagh. The study points out, for example, that Wal-Mart, the world's 12th-largest corporation, racks up sales revenues larger than the gross domestic product of 161 countries, including Israel, Poland and Greece. The combined sales of the top 200 corporations come to \$7.1 trillion, nearly twice the \$3.9 trillion in economic activity generated by the poorest 80 percent of the world's population, some 4.5 billion people. The report concludes that these corporations "are creating a global economic apartheid, not a global village." —Joel Bleifuss



# APPALL-O-METER

THE IN THESE TIMES INDEX OF INDECENCIES



By David Futrelle

## A rose is a rose 9.2

Peace has come to Afghanistan, and with peace has come a new, er, appreciation of womanhood. In a recent sermon noted by *Newsweek*, acting Afghani Education Minister Syed Ghiasuddin declared that a woman is like "a rose—you water it and keep it at home for yourself to look at and smell. It's not supposed to be taken out of the house to be smelled."

## Whistle while you work 6.9

At a recent protest outside New York's Disney Store, labor advocates highlighted the company's use of woefully underpaid Haitian laborers, who churn out Disney kitsch for as little as 28 to 30 cents an hour. Balderdash, a Disney spokesman told the *New York Observer*—their workers earn a full 48 cents an hour. "We've been in Haiti at least 10 years," the spokesman explained. "It's a nice factory. We're very proud."



## Home improvement 3.2

If you had just moved out of your house, would you redecorate the kitchen? If you were Uncle Sam, apparently you would. As the Associated Press reports, the U.S. government is still spending hundreds of millions of dollars to remodel military bases whose days are numbered—or bygone. At a base in Orlando, Fla., the Navy spent more than \$13 million to build a new dining hall, despite the fact that the base will be closing in two years. And Illinois' Fort Sheridan, which is already shuttered, is currently getting a \$3.3 million classroom addition. The Pentagon, for its part, points out that most such building

projects were in fact canceled. "We think the screening process worked pretty well," one spokesman told the press.

## Star struck 5.2

Lynne Plaskett, a Volusia, Fla., County Council member, recently revealed to viewers of *The Maury Povich Show* that she owes her life to visitors from outer space. According to Plaskett, two decades ago a flying saucer not much bigger than an actual saucer flew into her house, whooshed her up into the air, and with a blast from a mysterious energy source, cured her of cancer. Plaskett is up for re-election this November, and says she hopes voters will judge her on her record, not her *Close Encounter*. "I'm just hoping people can separate the two," she explained to the Associated Press.

## Appall-O-Meter scale

1. Martha Stewart Living Dead
2. Macarenish
3. Un Kemp-ed
4. Dole-orous
5. Below the Beltway
6. Ralph Reed-iculous
7. PRI-posterous
8. Netan-yahooish
9. Taliban Terrible
10. Unabombastic

anyone from Ott's progressive union, which is working to create an alliance with the workfare employees. In a word, said Ott, "it was elitist."

The presence of the AFL-CIO's top three leaders signaled a major departure from the federation's past complacency and conservatism, but their speeches displayed little in the way of fiery radicalism. While Sweeney, Secretary-Treasurer Richard Trumka and Executive Vice President Linda Chavez-Thompson all denounced corporate abuse, their plea was essentially for a return to the postwar labor-management "compact." "Only by organizing," said Sweeney, can we "bring business back to the high road." And in return, said Sweeney, organized labor "can and will help America compete in the global economy." Some teach-in participants, such as Yale labor historian David Montgomery, seemed to have a different view of the postwar-era "compact." "Those weren't really the good old days," Montgomery said, adding that unions improved working conditions during that period only by building a movement strong enough to oppose employer power—not by relying on a "sense of mutuality."

Resolving such issues will be crucial to the success of the American labor movement. To the extent that it let conflicting political ideas come to light, the teach-in was a success. The old labor leadership—and maybe the old academia—would have kept their opinions to themselves.

—Laura McClure

# ARGENTINA'S ECONOMIC WOES

A scant three years ago, Argentina was touted as the economic miracle of Latin America. Zero inflation, booming economic growth and deregulation in all sectors made it the darling of the world's financial institutions. Today the country faces spiraling unemployment, a shrinking middle

reaching out to grass-roots movements, especially rank-and-file workers, some of whom were working to revitalize the labor movement long before John Sweeney came to office. Ed Ott, political director of Communications Workers of America Local 1180 in New York City, said he decided not to attend the teach-in after he

noticed who was to speak at a panel on "work, welfare and the labor movement." The panel included professors from Harvard and Columbia as well as the new director of the AFL-CIO's education department. But workfare employees themselves—who are beginning to organize in New York—were not on the dais, nor was

class and widespread labor unrest. The success story has turned into a nightmare for embattled President Carlos Menem. Opposition parties and labor unions engineered a highly visible blackout and pot-banging rally in Buenos Aires the night of September 12, which resonated across the nation. Two weeks later, the same coalition of forces paralyzed much of the country with a 36-hour general strike. They plan to follow it up with another this month.

What happened to the Argentine miracle? Like so many countries rushing to join the new international economic order, Argentina is discovering the high social costs of the neoliberal model.

When Menem was elected in 1989, he inherited hyperinflation and economic recession. Guided by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), he imposed strict austerity measures, reduced government spending, and established parity between the dollar and the peso. With tariff barriers down and state enterprises from parks to airports on the auction block, foreign investors rushed to take advantage of financial opportunities. This influx of capital temporarily disguised the reduced productivity of the Argentinian

economy. The Mexican economy's December 1994 nosedive—the so-called “Tequila effect”—reverberated throughout the region's stock markets, but Menem was able to stave off the worst of it until after general elections in May.

Armed with a renewed mandate, Menem has leveraged extraordinary emergency powers from Congress, increasing the value-added tax from 18



to 21 percent, strengthening tax collection mechanisms and facilitating government rule by decree. Under these policies, the living standards of most Argentines have plummeted sharply. Unemployment reached 20 percent last year, before stabilizing at 17 percent (the official figure doesn't count wide-

spread underemployment). Health care and education have deteriorated. Thousands of retirees' government pensions have been reduced. And in some provinces, government employees have gone months without pay or received government “bonds” in lieu of salaries.

Menem has become increasingly isolated, but he has chosen to stake his government's survival on strict adherence to the IMF's structural adjustment, calling for labor concessions reminiscent of the 19th century: an extended (12-hour) workday, salary adjustments and mandatory overtime at management's discretion, the repeal of collective bargaining, and the automatic termination of expired labor contracts. His latest tactic has been to deregulate health insurance providers, traditionally tied to unions, thereby denying labor a major source of revenue. The General Confederation of Workers, the country's largest union and a traditional ally of Menem's Justicialist Party, firmly opposes the government's labor reform package. Even within the president's party, Menem's erstwhile colleagues Eduardo Duhalde, governor of the province of Buenos Aires, and Palito Ortega, ex-governor of Tucumán, have distanced themselves from the latest draconian measures. Duhalde is most likely to be Menem's rival in the 1999 presidential election.

A chilling premonition: Argentine democratic institutions are historically weak in times of economic recession. While a military coup is unlikely, given the armed forces' shattered reputation in the aftermath of the “Dirty War” of 1976-1983 and the failed Malvinas invasion, some form of jingoist adventurism is possible. Earlier this month, military commander Martin Balza rattled a saber at neighboring Chile over the long-simmering territorial dispute in the Campo de Hielos ice fields in the far south of the continent.

—Fred Spielberg

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## By the company they keep

IN CALIFORNIA, TWO VERY DIFFERENT CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM SCHEMES go head to head on November 5. Proposition 208 is a gutless concoction that puts a \$1,000 cap on PAC and individual campaign donation. The competing reform measure, Proposition 212, features \$100 contribution limits. Earlier this month, Californians for Political Reform, a group that favors Proposition 208, tried to woo corporate elites with a press release that reads, in part: “Business leaders are fed up with the incessant and ever-increasing demands for money by politicians. ... Politicians milk the corporate coffers shamelessly. ... The astute CEO will want to participate in the process to ensure responsible reform. ... Proposition 208, sponsored by the League of Women Voters, Common Cause, United We Stand America and the American Association of Retired Persons, is even-handed, responsible reform. Proposition 212, sponsored by the California Public Interest Research Group, the California Teachers Association and the Service Employees International Union, is reform with a grudge. Prop 212 abolishes corporate tax deductions for lobbying and bans direct contributions from corporations.” —J.B.



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# UNION STRUCK

## Party girl

**A**mong all the current strikes against oppressive employers across the country, one of the most controversial involves eight workers in Connecticut. Their seven-month-old walk-out may have tremendous implications for the labor movement because their employer is a union.

The National Association of Government Employees (NAGE), an affiliate of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), represents municipal and federal workers. NAGE operates offices across the country, including one in Cromwell, Conn., just outside of Hartford. In April 1995, the Cromwell office staff of lawyers, worker representatives and clerical workers organized as members of United Auto Workers (UAW) Local 376. They wanted higher salaries and better-regulated hours. But in the 18 months since they organized, the UAW workers still don't have a contract.

The last straw came in September 1995, when NAGE fired Bob Cerritelli, who led the organizing effort, soon after the UAW workers began contract negotiations with NAGE. In January, the workers filed a complaint with the National Labor Relations Board alleging that NAGE fired Cerritelli for his efforts to unionize the Cromwell office.

After nearly a year with the UAW and still without a contract, the workers walked out in March. Awaiting a ruling on the original NLRB charges, they have filed other complaints, including one accusing NAGE of threatening strikers.

"We knew that we were on virgin territory with NAGE because none of their offices had been unionized before," says Cerritelli. "But we didn't expect this."

David Bernard, national vice president of NAGE, says the union fired Cerritelli for submitting fraudulent expense reports. He also dismisses as "frivolous" the claims that NAGE engaged in any anti-union activity,

including charges that it threatened to lay off union organizers and refuses to bargain in good faith. "This is just an attack by the UAW to throw as much as possible against the wall to see what will stick," he says.

But NAGE must also contend with charges from within its own ranks. The presidents of six NAGE locals filed a complaint in early October with SEIU's national office, accusing NAGE officers of violating a SEIU constitutional provision that prohibits members from "acting as strikebreakers" by replacing striking workers.

Ross: "Should any one person be able to give as much money as you do?"

Streisand: "If you have it, you can give it."

Ross: "How about those who do not have it?"

Streisand: "They can't give it. They can vote."

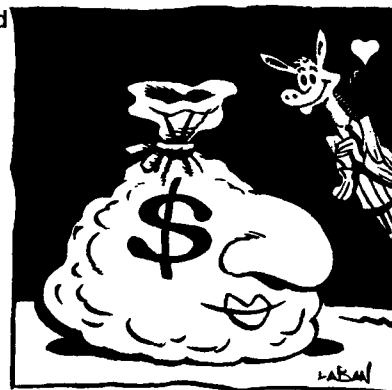
They can also eat cake. —J.B.

only want the same protections and provisions their union employers provide to their own members.

Peter Rachleff, a history professor at Macalester College in Minnesota who is himself active in the labor movement, says that this conundrum is only to be expected given the current state of trade unionism. "It's not just the worst unions that do this," he says. "Progressive unions have problems too. Make them an employer and they act like an employer." The debate is not likely to die soon, he adds. "If Sweeney and Co. can transform the labor movement from business unionism to a real social movement, this problem might disappear," he says. "But that's an awful lot to wish for."

—Leah Samuel

This bitter fight highlights the debate, which came to life with the advent of business unionism, over whether to unionize union staffers. In the '50s and '60s, just decades after the modern labor movement's radical beginnings, unions, eager to institutionalize themselves, became their own companies. They acquired buildings and hired staffs to do the business of representing and protecting workers. Now unions themselves have workers—workers who, Cerritelli argues,



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## DOWN TO THE WIRE IN WASHINGTON

**T**wo years ago, with the Republican Contract with America in one hand and anti-incumbent sentiment in the other, state Sen. Linda Smith ousted three-term incumbent Democrat Jolene Unsoeld from the



Third Congressional District seat in southwestern Washington. Unsoeld, along with five other of the state's Democrats in Congress, fell victim to the 1994 Republican revolution. Now, it appears a 40-year-old psychologist could swing the district back to its Democratic roots.

At the outset, hardly anyone thought Olympia Democrat Brian Baird had a chance of defeating Smith. The incumbent's grass-roots conservative campaign volunteers, known as "Linda's Army," were expected to march right over Baird. These true believers—who, like their representative, denounce big government—have donated countless hours doing everything from making fliers to door-to-door campaigning. Not surprisingly, they've also kept Smith's campaign expenses low.

So imagine their surprise on September 18, when primary election returns showed that Smith led Baird by only a few thousand votes, and lost to him in four of the nine counties in the district. (Washington conducts a "blanket" primary, in which Democrats, Republicans and independents vote on the same ballot.)

"It was a wake-up call to my supporters," says Smith, who remains at least outwardly calm about her re-election chances. "Now, they know they have to get out and work."

Baird has focused his criticism on Smith's conservative voting record. "She's basically voted down the line with Newt Gingrich," says Baird, echoing a campaign theme used by many Democrats this year.

Baird's strong showing in the primary will mean extra cash for his campaign. The Democratic Campaign Coordinating Committee has promised to kick in an undisclosed sum of money. Baird has yet to hear from the AFL-CIO, which is spending millions on advertising it hopes will assist other Democratic congressional candidates in the state.

State Democrats have also benefited from President Bill Clinton's bus tour of western Washington last month and the near invisibility of

Bob Dole's campaign in the state. Baird has traveled tirelessly in the 8,500-square-mile district, especially in Vancouver and along the coast, traditional Democratic areas of the district where Smith did well last time. Meanwhile, Smith, whose congressional schedule kept her away from the state for much of the year, admits she has a lot of people to visit before the election.

Smith is hoping to appeal once again to voters' mistrust of the political establishment, drawing attention to her record on campaign finance reform. She co-sponsored the Bipartisan Clean Congress Act of 1995, a bill that would have banned contributions from political action committees and set spending limits for candidates, although some say it has too many loopholes to be effective. (See "Reforming the beast," June 24.) In her campaign ads, Smith, who last year stopped accepting PAC

contributions, has portrayed Baird, who does accept PAC money, as a dupe of special interests. As of September 1, Baird had raised \$259,000 for his campaign and spent most of it; Smith had raised \$539,000 and spent more than half. When combined with the \$187,000 she raised in 1995, however, Smith's war chest totals \$726,000—more than \$100,000 over the \$600,000 spending limit called for in her campaign finance reform bill.

—Mindy Chambers

## SOURCES

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## THE ADVENTURES OF A HUGE MOUTH

By Peter Hannan



# T H E F I R S T S T O N E

## A MEDIA SNOW JOB

By Joel Bleifuss

On August 18, *San Jose Mercury News* investigative reporter Gary Webb began a three-part series describing how contra-connected Nicaraguan drug dealers sold tons of cocaine to street gangs in South Central Los Angeles and then turned the profits over to the CIA's contra army. The Nicaraguans, Webb wrote, supplied much of this cheap cocaine to dope dealer Ricky "Freeway Rick" Ross, who "turned the cocaine powder into crack and wholesaled it to gangs across the country."

One profoundly troubling aspect of this burgeoning scandal is how the mainstream news media have chosen to cover—or not cover—this story. That the contras were smuggling drugs is outrageous, but that has been reported in the alternative press, including *In These Times*, for years. (See "Is North network cocaine connected?" December 10, 1986.) That the Reagan and Bush administrations tried to cover up their knowledge of these operations is also old news. (See "A key witness dies; a controversy lives on," December 24, 1986.) Nonetheless, the nation's newspapers of record, particularly the *Washington Post*, have failed to give the story broader exposure. Over the past decade, the *Post* has covered the contra-cocaine connection only when it could not be ignored.

Perhaps there is a method to the madness. Jim Naureckas, the editor of *Extra!*, the newsletter of the media watchdog group Fairness & Accuracy In Reporting, covered Iran-contra for *In These Times*. "In the '80s, to say 'contras' and 'drugs' together marked you as a radical conspiracy theorist," says Naureckas. But now, he adds, "the story has gone from 'that's ridiculous,' to 'everybody knows about it,' without ever being news in between."

On April 14, 1989, the *Post* devoted one brief story to the final report of the Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Terrorism, Narcotics and International Operations, headed by Sen. John Kerry (D-MA), which found that contras were involved in drug trafficking and that government agencies

were aware of that involvement. After trivializing the report's findings, *Post* reporter Michael Isikoff concluded that claims of drug trafficking by high-level contras "could not be substantiated."

The *Post* had nothing more to say on the subject until the fall of 1991, when Gen. Manuel Noriega went to trial on drug-trafficking charges in Miami. Isikoff then wrote: "Allegations that the federal government worked with known drug dealers to arm the contras have been raised for years, but congressional investigations in the late 1980s found little evidence to back charges that it was an organized activity approved by high-level U.S. officials."

That assertion was soon contradicted by the U.S. government's own witnesses against Noriega. In October, Floyd Carlton

Caceres testified that his smuggling operation flew U.S. guns to the contras in Nicaragua and brought cocaine into the United States on the return flight. However, federal Judge William Hoeveler, sustaining all objections from U.S. prosecutors, refused to allow Noriega's defense lawyer to press Caceres further on the subject. At one point, Hoeveler snapped, "Just stay away from it."

And in November, convicted Colombian drug lord and government witness Carlos Lehder told the court that an unnamed U.S. official offered to allow him to smuggle cocaine into the United States in exchange for use of a Bahamian island that he owned as part of the contra supply route. Lehder went on to testify that the Colombian cartel had donated about \$10 million to the contras.

At this point, the *Post* finally took notice. "The Kerry hearings didn't get the attention they deserved at the time," its editorial concluded. "The Noriega trial brings this sordid aspect of the Nicaraguan engagement to fresh public attention."

How does one square this editorial with Isikoff's dismissive coverage of Kerry's findings two years earlier? If, as the *Post* says, "the Kerry hearings didn't get the attention they deserved," why did the paper's editors at the time bury their one little story about Kerry's report on page 20?

While the *Post* acknowledged, albeit belatedly, the credibility of the Kerry investigation's findings, it ignored the contra-cocaine connection story until Webb's exposé began making waves the paper could not ignore. On October 4, the *Post* devoted two full pages to Webb's story. In their analysis, reporters Walter Pincus and Roberto Suro acknowledge that the contras were trafficking cocaine, but they dismiss Webb's thesis that the Nicaraguan drug dealers' operations were key to the spread of the crack epidemic. Pincus and Suro report that in the '80s, investigators and journalists found "that a few contras, and some of the rebels' suppliers and supporters, were involved in drug smuggling." This assertion, however, contradicts Alan Fiers, the CIA's Central American expert,



who testified at the Kerry hearings, "With respect to [drug trafficking] by the resistance forces ... it is not a couple of people, it is a lot of people."

Pincus and Suro also report that contrary to Webb's assertions, their own investigation found that "the available information does not support the conclusion that the CIA-backed contras ... played a major role in the emergence of crack as a narcotic in widespread use across the United States." As for Los Angeles drug dealer "Freeway Rick" Ross, Pincus and Suro write, "The mere idea that any one person could have played a decisive role in the nationwide crack epidemic is rejected out of hand by academic experts and law enforcement officials."

In a December 20, 1994 issue of the *Los Angeles Times*, reporter Jesse Katz drew the opposite conclusion:

If there was an eye to the storm, if there was a criminal mastermind behind crack's decade-long reign, if there was one outlaw capitalist most responsible for flooding Los Angeles' streets with mass-marketed cocaine, his name was Freeway Rick. ... He was a favorite son of the Colombian cartels ... whose single-minded obsession was to become the biggest dope dealer in history. ... He transformed a curbside operation at 87th and Figueroa into the Wal-Mart of cocaine. While most other dealers toiled at the bottom rungs of the market, his coast-to-coast conglomerate was selling more than 500,000 rocks a day, a staggering turnover that put the drug within reach of anyone with a few dollars.

Pincus and Suro approvingly quote Kerry: "There is no question in my mind that people affiliated with, on the payroll of and carrying the credentials of the CIA were involved in drug trafficking while involved in support of the contras, but it is also important to note that we never found any evidence to suggest that these traffickers ever targeted any one geographic area or population group." In other words, we should be comforted by the fact that while the CIA may have allowed its contra army to smuggle drugs into U.S. cities, the agency was an equal-opportunity criminal that never deliberately targeted the African-American community.

Pincus and Suro go on to explain: "The CIA knew about some of these activities and did little or nothing to stop them, according to accounts from then-senior CIA officers and other government officials." But the two reporters conveniently fail to explore the evidence Webb cites that shows the CIA interfered with attempts by law enforcement officials to curtail the contras' drug operation. Pincus and Suro ignore the fact that during Ross' trial earlier this year, government prosecutors obtained a court order that prevented



defense lawyers from questioning former contra and drug smuggler Oscar Blandon—one of the government's key witnesses—about his ties to the CIA. Assistant U.S. Attorney L.J. O'Neale, in his petition to the court to forbid all mention of the CIA, explained that Blandon "will admit that he was a large-scale dealer in cocaine, and there is no additional benefit to any defendant to inquire as to the Central Intelligence Agency."

As a *Washington Post* reporter on national security issues, Pincus failed to break any of the major stories of the scandal-plagued Reagan and Bush administrations. In fact, during this period, the *Post*, the *New York Times* and other mainstream periodicals sought to protect the country's national security apparatus from a thorough housecleaning.

In 1987, for example, editors at *Time* suppressed an article that examined the contra-cocaine connection. According to the November 1991 *Extra!*, a senior editor at *Time* told the reporter who had written the piece, "*Time* is institutionally behind the contras. If this story were about the Sandinistas and drugs, you'd have no trouble getting it in the magazine."

Perhaps the *Post* is institutionally behind the CIA. The paper's October 9 editorial on the contra-crack connection again acknowledges the Kerry committee findings that "the CIA had dealings with drug pushers." The *Post* then goes on to explain: "Cold War inhibitions then current kept Americans from mustering the appropriate outrage." That statement would be more accurate if "Americans" was replaced with "*Post* editors." In November 1988, in the middle of the Iran-contra scandal, *Post* owner Katharine Graham spoke to a gathering of senior CIA employees at the agency's Langley, Va., headquarters. "We live in a dirty and dangerous world," she said. "There are some things the general public does not need to know and shouldn't. I believe democracy flourishes when the government can take legitimate steps to keep its secrets and when the press can decide whether to print what it knows." ◀

**H E A L T H C A R E**

# Legislation for sale

O

n the campaign trail, Bill Clinton has been tout-ing health insurance reform as one of his administration's proudest accomplishments. He describes the Kassebaum-Kennedy bill, which he signed into law on August 21, as a simple bill that will protect the health insurance of people who have been sick or hurt.

*The  
Kassebaum-  
Kennedy bill  
gives crumbs to  
the uninsured  
and cake to  
the insurance  
industry.*

By Ramón  
Castellblanch

In fact, under its veneer of incremental health insurance reform, the Kassebaum-Kennedy bill contains a complicated array of political payoffs. The bill was loaded with rewards for special interests close to House Speaker Newt Gingrich and his House majority, including heavy contributors in the health insurance industry and the heir of the Star-Kist Tuna fortune.

When it left the Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee in August 1995, the health

insurance bill, named for its authors, Sens. Nancy Kassebaum (R-KS) and Edward Kennedy (D-MA), addressed the problem known in the health insurance industry as "pre-existing condition exclusions." These exclusions deny coverage to newly hired workers if they or a family member have recently been sick or injured.

The Kassebaum-Kennedy bill did not bar pre-existing condition exclusions, but it did specify that they could last no longer than one year. According to the Congressional Budget Office (CBO), this change would move 400,000 Americans onto the rolls of the insured. Presidential candidates Bill Clinton and Bob Dole have inflated that number to 25 million, citing a highly dubious 1995 U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) study that assumed that every person who changed jobs got another job with family health insurance and that every such worker had someone in their family with a pre-existing condition. In fact, the Kassebaum-Kennedy bill will make only a small dent in the growing num-

ber of Americans without health insurance. According to the Lewin Group, a Washington-based health insurance consulting firm, even with the legislation, 1 million people will join the ranks of the uninsured each year.

After the Senate committee hearings, the bill would normally have gone to the Senate floor for a vote, but instead secret "holds" placed by the Republicans, along with other procedural delays, caused it to languish for eight months. When then-Majority Leader Bob Dole finally allowed the bill to reach the Senate floor in April, House Republicans had taken control of it.

While the Senate stood by, House Republicans took up their own version of the bill last March. The House leadership, under the auspices of Rep. Dennis Hastert (R-IL), quickly set about the task of seeing how many special interests they could reward in the bill.

First on their list was the Golden Rule Insurance Co. Golden Rule sells a two-part health care financing package—high-deductible insurance coupled with medical savings accounts (MSAs). In this arrangement, people foot their own medical bills using funds in the MSA up to the threshold of the deductible, say \$5,000. To make it easier to sell these packages, Golden Rule wanted Congress to allow clients to place pre-tax earnings into these MSAs.

Such a tax break would aggravate the problems of the U.S. health insurance system in several ways. By providing a new tax shelter, MSAs would draw healthier and wealthier individuals away from the regular health insurance market. With the main health insurance market left with a sicker pool of people, health insurance premiums for most people would presumably rise. Some also see MSAs as a way to force workers into high-deductible health insurance poli-



cies, raising workers' out-of-pocket health care costs.

J. Patrick Rooney, a member of the family that controls Golden Rule, and John M. Whelan, the company's president, gave more than \$117,000 to GOPAC, Gingrich's political action committee. Rooney acknowledged that he and Golden Rule employees have contributed \$1.1 million to the Republican National Committee and various Republican candidates since 1993. In return, House Republicans put tax-shelter status for MSAs into the Kassebaum-Kennedy bill. The CBO estimates that, over the next six years, this exemption will cost the government more than \$1 billion in lost tax revenue.

Next on the list of special interests to pay off was American Family Life Insurance, a subsidiary of AFLAC, which sells cancer insurance and other types of supplemental coverage. A 1994 GAO study of this type of insurance policy found that in 1991, 3 million seniors were paying approximately \$2 billion a year for insurance that duplicated their Medicare coverage. When they fell sick, the policies often wouldn't cover the treatment because Medicare already paid for it. The Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1990 (OBRA 90) included a requirement that companies selling supplemental policies inform seniors that their cancer policies duplicated some Medicare benefits.

AFLAC has contributed more than \$200,000 to Republican candidates for federal office and more than \$250,000 directly to the Republican Party during this year's electoral campaign. According to a congressional source, AFLAC lobbyists working out of the office of Rep. Mac Collins (R-GA) were responsible for a subtitle in the health insurance bill that repeals the OBRA 90 requirement that insurers inform consumers about Medicare duplication. In addition, the subtitle extends retroactive protection to insurers for civil and criminal penalties arising from violations of this requirement.

House Republicans also made sure that insurance companies selling long-term care insurance were taken care of. From 1988 to the present, the number of long-term care policies sold has soared from 20,000 to more than 440,000. A key problem with long-term care insurance is that it often doesn't cover people who have been admitted to nursing homes, since

**Health Insurance Claim Form**

Send complete form to:  
F.U. Insurance Company  
666 Greed Road  
Despicable Illinois 685

Please print or type clearly

Notice to all parties completing this form:  
It is fraudulent to fill out this form with information you  
know to be false. Please have the lying to use. Thanks.

**POLICY CANCELED**

ID Number: 12345678901234567890  
GROUP NUMBER: 12345678901234567890  
IDENTIFICATION LABEL: 12345678901234567890  
GUILTY RACE: 12345678901234567890

Patient (claimant) for information:  
PATIENT'S FULL LEGAL NAME: 12345678901234567890  
INITIALS: 12345678901234567890  
SEX: 12345678901234567890  
DATE OF BIRTH: 12345678901234567890

Member (claimant) for information:  
MEMBER (POLICYHOLDER) NAME: 12345678901234567890  
SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER: 12345678901234567890  
DATE OF BIRTH: 12345678901234567890

Claim information:  
ACCIDENT? YES  
WORK RELATED? YES  
ILLNESS? YES  
WHO CARES? ?

Other Insurance (Someone else to go blubbering to when we give you the heave)

many policies require extreme levels of disability for coverage to start. Some policies, for example, stipulate that an individual be unable to perform two of six very basic activities of daily living (eating, bathing, dressing, moving about the house, using the toilet, and continence) in order to be eligible for benefits. As a consequence, someone can be completely unable to live independently—incapable of moving about the house unaided, for instance—and still not get benefits.

The Health Insurance Association of America (HIAA) used the "revolving door" between government and big business to help get its way on the issue. Chip Kahn was on the Republican staff on the Health Subcommittee of the House Ways and Means Committee when former Rep. Willis Gradison (R-OH) was the panel's ranking Republican. When Gradison became president of the HIAA, Kahn followed him there. Together they orches-

trated the "Harry and Louise" attacks on Clinton's 1993 health care plan. After the Republicans took control of Congress, Kahn returned to the House, becoming chief of staff for the Health Subcommittee. In this post, he oversaw the House's work on most of the health insurance bill, including a long-term care insurance subtitle. Under the subtitle, long-term care insurance receives favorable tax treatment and federal rules continue to make it hard for people to collect benefits.

**T**he HIAA received another major reward in the bill. Health insurers have long wanted a national health care data network that would help them identify and avoid groups or individuals likely to be sick or hurt. The network would use medical records to show which people and groups were most likely to file claims. Such a network would have to surmount two technical obstacles: First, insurance company codes for medical diagnoses and treatments vary widely. Secondly, health care consumers are not assigned numerical identifiers.

A subtitle in the Kassebaum-Kennedy bill requires that all medical claims filed electronically use standardized codes and identifiers. It assigns the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) the job of developing these codes and identifiers, and allows the use of Social Security numbers as identifiers.

Such a national health care data network will pose a serious threat to privacy. If everybody's medical records are accessible via computer and identified by Social Security numbers, these can be used against them not only by insurance companies but by any business. For example, banks could theoretically obtain medical records and use them to make credit decisions. Likewise, prospective employers could get access to these data and use them when hiring.

The bill established a process for developing privacy protections that is fraught with problems. It required DHHS to consult with the National Committee on Vital and Health Statistics on privacy protections, but it mandated that insurers and health insurance claim processors be heavily represented on the committee. Worse still, it allowed the establishment of a procedure to ensure privacy to lag as much as two years behind the introduction of standardized codes

and identifiers. That delay means that in the interim, the health care data industry has a free hand to compile medical histories and sell the data, and the insurance industry can use the data to identify high-risk groups.

**S**preading around the favors, House Republicans also helped the American Medical Association (AMA). Many physicians make referrals to medical businesses such as labs and therapists in exchange for fees from the businesses. The practice of taking kickbacks for referrals wastes large amounts of Medicare funds each year. Because this arrangement can be illegal, some physicians have sought to weaken enforcement of anti-kickback laws.

One way the AMA proposed to weaken enforcement was to require DHHS to provide "advisory opinions" to physicians considering financial deals with medical businesses. These advisory opinions would suggest ways to accept compensation for referrals without breaking the law. Physicians could then use the advisory opinions to defend themselves in court. According to the CBO, the opinions would cost federal taxpayers \$390 million over six years in lost penalties and additional administrative staff.

The AMA curried favor with the 104th Congress with a battalion of lobbyists and a political action committee that donated tens of thousands of dollars to members. Last year Rep. Bill Thomas (R-CA), chair of the Health Subcommittee of the House Ways and Means Committee, acknowledged that an AMA plan was the "blueprint" for much of the House's 1995 Medicare proposal. The AMA recently declared that this session of Congress produced "the AMA's best Washington record in at least 20 years." The Kassebaum-Kennedy health insurance bill was a final feather in the organization's cap. Despite its cost to taxpayers, the bill contains "fraud and abuse" provisions that require DHHS to provide advisory opinions to physicians considering financial deals with medical businesses.

To top off the pile of deals for their allies, House Republicans took care of an interest with absolutely no connection to health care: billionaire expatriate Joseph J. Bogdanovich. Bogdanovich, heir of the Star-Kist Tuna fortune, was earning a huge income from his large foreign holdings and, as a U.S. citizen, was paying U.S. taxes on it. To avoid that tax burden, he gave up his U.S. citizenship in 1995.

Bogdanovich actively lobbied against any tax on expatriates' foreign holdings. He argued that expatriates should only pay U.S. taxes on their U.S. holdings. To drive his message home, he hired former Rep. Guy Vander Jagt (R-MI), who had been on the Joint Committee on Taxation (JCT) before going to work for Washington tax attorney Kenneth J. Keis. After the Republicans took control of Congress, they named Keis chief of staff of the JCT. Keis was closely involved in drafting the revenue title of the health insurance bill.

Under the guise of providing revenue to offset the losses

*Continued on page 36*

## IT'S NOT TOO LATE!

### Dear Donors and Sustainers:

The deadline for this year's Anniversary Greeting Ads has been extended. You can now send in your greetings and words of support up to **November 1st**. Mail them to Pat Gray, 2040 N. Milwaukee Ave., Chicago, IL 60647, or fax them to (312) 772-4180. We look forward to including your names among our supporters.



# C A M P A I G N ' 9 6

## A cookie-cutter campaign

*Paul Wellstone  
is an  
unabashed  
populist, but  
his campaign  
has all the  
earmarks of  
politics as  
usual.*

By Monika Bauerlein

**T**he billboard has become a fixture on Minneapolis/St. Paul's main thoroughfare, looming over a grocery-store parking lot and the AxMan surplus store. A cartoon character with a familiar face is shown flying skyward, the chest of his superhero costume emblazoned with a "W." Next to the figure, big letters blare "WELFARE MAN." And below, "Elect Rudy Boschwitz U.S. Senate."

Crude? Maybe. But goofy as it looks, the billboard—an earlier version of which showed Sen. Paul Wellstone's name altered to read "Welfare"—is part of a hard-core campaign to reinstate the Republican who once held his seat. The race, once considered a cakewalk for Wellstone, has turned into a tooth-and-nail battle, in good part because of an unprecedented infusion of national GOP cash. To date, the National Republican Senatorial

Committee (NRSC) has spent more than \$1.2 million on an ad campaign in Minnesota masterminded by one of the most aggressive consultants this side of Dick Morris. Wellstone, committee officials have said, is their No. 1 target for defeat.

It's easy to see why. A populist college professor who beat Boschwitz on raw grassroots energy in 1990, Wellstone is by any account the Senate's feistiest Democrat. He's picked fights over nuclear waste, the minimum wage and NAFTA; gone up against his colleagues on lobbying and campaign finance reform; and battled the White House with his advocacy of a single-payer health system. Most recently, he was the only senator up for re-election to vote against the Clinton/Gingrich welfare reform bill.

And so the campaign against him is easily summed up in one word: "liberal." The mantra cropped up no fewer than 10 times in one short NRSC press release; sometimes modified to "embarrassingly liberal" or "ultra-liberal," it was repeated over and over in the

TV and radio ads that filled Minnesota airwaves through the summer and fall. The strategy is as old as dirt, and about as simple: Wellstone, the message goes, is fundamentally at odds with a state that, though traditionally Democratic, is also profoundly conservative in a Garrison Keillor sort of way. It's an idea, a strategist close to the Boschwitz campaign says, born of an early internal poll, one of whose questions featured the "L" word: "It was obvious that that was a red flag," she says. "The responses just went off the chart."

But if Boschwitz is banking on conventional political wisdom, the sitting senator pits his hope on an uncommon idea: That, at bottom, the electorate is a lot more willing to contemplate "radical" positions than politicians give it credit for. And to understand what he means by that, you have to go back to 1990 and what a lot of people still call the upset of the decade. A professor of political science at Carleton College—a small, prestigious liberal arts school 50 miles from the Twin Cities—Wellstone began his campaign in 1989 with a motley crew of helpers drawn from Jesse Jackson's Rainbow Coalition. No one took him very seriously; Boschwitz was considered hard to beat, and on the Democratic side there were plenty of better-known and better-connected candidates.

But Wellstone had a secret weapon: the pavement-pounding, door-knocking, phone-banking stamina of his supporters. They scoured farm country, blue-collar neighborhoods and activist meetings, mobilizing what the pundits hadn't yet identified as "angry voters." There was a recession that added to the aftertaste of the farm crisis and the disaster Minnesota's taconite industry had become. Wellstone's message of standing for "the little fellers, not the Rockefellers," hit home. The insurgents took the endorse-

ment of their party, whose name in Minnesota, it's worth noting, is "Democratic-Farmer-Labor" (DFL); they went on to win the primary election in September.

And then they kicked into high gear—still with no money to speak of, yet almost cockily convinced that that might not matter. Boschwitz was no easy target. The son of Jewish immigrants who fled the Nazis before World War II, he'd made a fortune building a small lumber company into the chain that paneled the Upper Midwest's rec rooms. Wearing his trademark plaid shirt, Boschwitz had appeared in countless Plywood Minnesota commercials, creating a folksy image that helped him win the Senate race in 1978. He skated to reelection in 1984, his theme that "The Best is Yet to Come" a perfect companion to Reagan's "Morning in America."

**B**ut by 1990, Boschwitz had become part of "the System." Newspaper stories chronicled his almost uncanny fundraising skills; he took an entrepreneur's flair to the task and, unlike many of his colleagues, actually seemed to enjoy it. His massive war chest was his biggest asset going into the election; it was also his main liability.

Stuck in Washington with that year's budget battle, Boschwitz was easy prey for Wellstone charges that he was out of touch, an insider who prized money and power over the folks back home. His campaign ran odd and humorous ads emphasizing those points, breaking practically every convention of the business in the process. One (now known as "Fast-Paced Paul") showed him zipping through scenes and themes, noting that "unlike my opponent, I don't have a lot of money, so I have to talk fast." Another, modeled after the documentary *Roger & Me*, had Wellstone searching high and low for Boschwitz so they could debate.

Boschwitz finally did return from Washington and started fighting back. But it wasn't a lucky year for Republicans in Minnesota. The party's candidate for governor was forced to bail out after being accused of pulling bikini tops off his friend's teenage daughters. And in the waning days of the campaign, news leaked out about a mailing the Boschwitz campaign had sent to Jewish voters, chastising Wellstone for marrying a non-Jew and raising his children outside the faith. Even with those troubles, Boschwitz remained the odds-on favorite until the last minute. "We really won that one on Election Day," recalls one Wellstone staffer who worked on the 1990 campaign. "When you look at our numbers, you'll see that we turned out people who haven't been out to vote before or since. People that wouldn't show up in the polls because they weren't 'likely voters.'" By the time the fat lady sang, Wellstone had squeaked into the Senate by a 3 percent margin.

The six years since haven't been easy ones for Wellstone. Within weeks after he took office, the Gulf War broke out and he came out against it, earning scorn from veterans' groups and editorial writers. Pundits ridiculed him for not acting "senatorial" enough: He didn't wear the right suits, didn't moderate his positions sufficiently, and generally ran afoul of the Senate's clubby rules. Not long after Wellstone

held a press conference by the Vietnam Veterans Memorial to announce his opposition to the Gulf War, George Bush was quoted as asking "Who is this chickenshit?"

Since then, Wellstone has toned down quite a bit. He's taken lessons to moderate his fiery speaking style and learned how to socialize with his Senate colleagues; he studied the rules of the Senate and the finer points of horsetrading. The Democratic establishment, never too fond of him, nevertheless put him forward as a spokesperson from time to time. Even so, Wellstone never really attained insider status in Washington—and that, more than anything, made him stand out to a lot of people.

"I think what's been fascinating about Paul is that he was a voice for people who weren't necessarily affiliated with the Democratic or the Republican parties," says Ann Wilson, national director of the Jobs With Peace campaign. "He got elected in part by people who felt there needed to be an alternative voice. And he continued to be there for them. He was open to people who, with a lot of other members, couldn't even get in the door."

The balance of power on Capitol Hill being what it was, Wellstone's advocacy for underdogs didn't make him the Senate's most successful member. Democrat and Republican colleagues alike shot down many of his proposals, including a bill requiring insurance companies to give equal coverage to mental illness and a ban on lobbyist gifts to legislators. But he also registered the occasional success—a compromise that shook loose money for the low-income energy assistance program; a bill cracking down on domestic violence; and a measure requiring more roll-call votes, forcing senators to make public their positions on controversial bills. In six years, Wellstone fundamentally shook up a large group of his supporters only once, with his recent vote for the Defense of Marriage Act. He's been explaining that one ever since, saying he "wasn't ready to change the definition of marriage in this country," and adding that on the same day of that vote, he co-authored a bill barring workplace discrimination against gays and lesbians.

**O**n one point, though, Wellstone has seriously flip-flopped over the years: campaign finance. While remaining one of Washington's strongest advocates for reform, he has pulled back on commitments regarding his own campaigns several times. Early on in his Senate bid, he promised not to accept PAC donations. Later he said he wouldn't take out-of-state PAC money, only to modify that pledge to say he didn't accept money from PACs with no Minnesota affiliation. Finally, by 1992, he was asking for donations from any and all PACs. For this year's campaign, Wellstone has been accepting donations from PACs as long as they have members in Minnesota. Similarly, Wellstone at one point promised he'd no longer accept individual contributions over \$100, the limit he was advocating for all campaigns. But last December, he wrote to supporters saying he'd have to renege on that promise "with a sense of sadness. Now I'm in this rotten system. I'm headed toward an



election." By spring, he was attending campaign benefits at the homes of the rich and famous—a poignant contrast to his 1990 slogan.

Wellstone has explained his switch by saying that while he believes in reform, he can't unilaterally disarm in the face of a challenge from a champion fundraiser. And he hasn't. On the contrary, by late August he'd pulled in close to \$6 million during the campaign cycle, while Boschwitz had received just over \$3 million. Wellstone held the edge on raising money from small donors: Contributions under \$200 made up 80 percent of his total, compared to only 30 percent for Boschwitz. He also beat Boschwitz in the PAC game, pulling in more than \$500,000 from committees, many of them related to organized labor. Of Wellstone's individual contributions, some 42 percent came from outside Minnesota, including a substantial chunk from California; Boschwitz raised about 38 percent of his individual donations out of state, with New Yorkers particularly generous.

While many Wellstone supporters insist that amassing campaign cash is the only way the senator has a fighting chance, not everyone is convinced. "I don't think he needed \$7 million—which is what he'll probably spend by the time it's over—to win this," says Pat Forciea, who managed the 1990 campaign. "And I think six years ago, people would have been surprised to hear 'guess what, Paul Wellstone will run the biggest money machine any Democrat has ever put together in Minnesota.' I think it's going to end up working against him."

Republicans are hoping it does. So far, the footage they gathered earlier this year of Wellstone walking into big-money fundraisers has been collecting dust on the shelf while the "ultraliberal" tune played. But as this was being written, Minnesota GOP circles were abuzz with talk of a whole new campaign getting ready for prime time. "You can just see the ad they could cut in about 15 seconds," says Sarah Janecek, a Republican consultant who worked on Boschwitz's 1984 campaign. "You take what he said in '90, and then you show him hanging out at the Rockefeller mansion. It's a no-brainer."

One reason why Republicans so far have been holding off on campaign finance charges may be that the topic hits a little too close to home. In addition to Boschwitz's own history, this Senate race, like many others around the country, has seen eye-popping amounts of money spent by national GOP organizations. (The Democratic Senate Campaign Committee has not spent any significant cash in Minnesota.) Until this



Sen. Paul Wellstone at the Gay  
Pride Festival in Minneapolis  
earlier this year.

year, party organizations were highly restricted in how much they could spend to help individual candidates. Now, a Supreme Court ruling and some innovative accounting techniques have opened the floodgates. In Minnesota, the NRSC has been running commercials that looked, walked and quacked like campaign ads, but ended with a tag line on the order of "Call liberal Sen. Paul Wellstone and tell him he's wrong on [welfare, balancing the budget, etc.]." That line, the committee claims, makes the commercials "issue advocacy" that doesn't count against campaign spending limits.

All of which, in the view of many Wellstone supporters, reinforces the argument that there is no point in playing Mr. Nice Guy. Throughout the summer, they seethed at what they saw as Wellstone's failure to respond to the NRSC and Boschwitz ad barrages—two ostensibly separate efforts that sounded almost identical and were both directed by consultant Arthur Finkelstein. Finkelstein's credits include the campaigns of North Carolina's Jesse Helms and New York's Alfonse D'Amato; most recently, he helped Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, crafting ads that combined pictures of bombed-out buses with footage of Labor Party opponent Shimon Peres shaking hands with PLO leader Yasser Arafat. So far, Finkelstein's efforts appear to be paying off.

While polls show that Bill Clinton leads Bob Dole by as much as 30 percentage points in Minnesota, the Senate race has become too close to call. In early October, a Pioneer Press/WCCO/Minnesota Public Radio poll showed Wellstone at 44 percent and Boschwitz at 40, with a 3.5 percent margin of error. Buried in that overall figure was a striking gender gap: 50 percent of women favored Wellstone while 34 percent backed Boschwitz. Among men, the situation

*Continued on page 36*

**CAMPAIGN '96**

# Congress in the balance

**A**

s a show, the election of 1996 is an unambiguous flop, and the only relief in sight is that it will all be over in a month. Even the amusing moments in the campaign tend to be a little sad, like Bob Dole slipping back three and a half decades to praise a recent triumph—Hideo Nomo's no-hitter—by the *Brooklyn Dodgers*. And it certainly hasn't been exciting: While there are plenty of close congressional races, there's no suspense in the presidential contest. Bill Clinton looks like a sure thing, but the mood of the electorate is closer to resignation than to anticipation. Post-season baseball and new season television are a lot more engaging, and millions of us, while giving the presidential debates a try, were hanging onto the remote, ready to switch to another channel.

*Empty campaign rhetoric notwithstanding, much is at stake in this year's elections.*

By Wilson Carey McWilliams

In fact, President Clinton

has taken to urging his audiences to forget about the election's dreary present and look to its more compelling long-term consequences. When he compares the decision in 1996 to the ratification of the Constitution or the struggle against slavery, he can be forgiven not only because he is well within the hyperbole quota for a presidential election—Theodore Roosevelt likened the election of 1912 to Armageddon—but because there are important, even momentous, things at stake this year that are crucial to the framing of American politics in the next century. Any new administration will be confronted with the impending financial crises of Social Security and Medicare and will have to face the strains on the body politic occasioned by “globalization,” revolutionary technology and our appalling and escalating inequality. Of course, wherever they can, Clinton and Dole and the vast majority of candidates for Congress are dodging and blurring these problems and their potential costs, talking sunshine at eventide. But for anyone who's really listening, it's possible to make out the

shape of things to come.

Don't bet on the possibility, but if Bob Dole were to win, he would almost certainly have a Republican-controlled Congress. We could expect a few gestures toward social conservatism—for example, “partial-birth” abortions would surely be banned—but Dole is at bottom a moderate on these issues and would be likely to balk if right-wingers pushed their agenda too far. On the other hand, his tax cut would become law with relatively few changes, probably pushing income inequality toward the roof and making it impossible to balance the budget by 2002 without substantially curtailing entitlements, something few Republicans would be eager to take responsibility for. There would be some splashy symbolic gestures—Congress might well pass a balanced budget amendment—but Dole and his party would be inclined to rely heavily on happy-talk growth forecasts, as euphoric as Reagan's but without the grace of rhetoric.

All that, however, is only a bad dream. Clinton will be re-elected; what remains to be seen is the nature of the Congress with which he'll be working. There, Republican prospects are at least tolerable, especially given the recent turn toward compromise by incumbent GOP majorities. Right-wing victories in a raft of Republican primaries give Democrats a shot at the Senate, but the odds favor the Republicans; and while the GOP will lose some House seats, it expects gains in the South and may hold on to a narrowed House majority as well. The presidential race is mostly irrelevant to these calculations: Coattails are almost as obsolete as tailed coats in American politics, as fewer and fewer voters are strong partisans or vote straight tickets. Aside from



Clinton's first two years and the peculiar case of Jimmy Carter, divided government has been the rule for more than a quarter-century. Still, a Democratic House is more likely than not, and if Clinton's lead is big enough, the Democrats might win it all.

Whatever sort of Congress he gets, Clinton figures to ask for a modest, targeted tax cut, emphasizing education—as he promised, rather repetitively, in the first presidential debate—and he stands a good chance of getting it. Similarly, within the limits imposed by the balanced budget agreement, he will push for increased funds for education, law enforcement and the environment—the themes of his campaign and, not incidentally, three areas where opinion polls show support for more active government. There too, Clinton's bargaining position will be considerably strengthened by re-election, and he has good prospects for success. Social liberalism will make small gains, especially because the Senate, even if Republicans retain control, will be more inclined to approve Clinton's judicial appointments. There will be no incoming Republican president to fill open judgeships for at least four more years, and Republicans have learned the risk in letting themselves be seen as rule-or-ruin obstructionists. Similarly, knowing that they'll have Clinton to deal with for four more years, the military may edge toward actually observing the “don't ask, don't tell” policy, if Clinton pushes for it.

On the big questions, however, the congressional outcome will make a difference. In the case of Social Security, the “crisis” is basically illusory: There are several easy ways to plug the trust fund's prospective shortfall. Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-NY) has been a leading voice in favor of adjusting the annual cost-of-living increase in Social Security downward to reflect a more realistic estimate of inflation. And policy analysts on both sides of the aisle have pointed out that raising the retirement age would also do the trick. On the other hand, not many members of Congress, present or prospective, are willing to take on a flaw in the system much more serious than the potential trust fund shortfall: the lingering fiction that Social Security is self-and-employer-financed insurance, a myth that makes the Social Security tax radically regressive. As of last year, the tax was levied only on income up to \$61,200, so that low- and middle-income Americans pay on all their income while at the upper-income levels a larger and larger percentage of income goes untaxed. If, as was done with the Medicare tax, the cap on taxable earnings were removed—a change that would face bitter opposition—not only would the projected shortfall disappear, but it should even be possible to slightly lower the Social Security tax rate, increasing take-home pay for Americans at the lower end of the income scale.

The problem of Medicare is more serious than Social Security, demanding either a cost-curtailling limitation of services or an increase in taxes, and very likely both. As Democrats have been happily demonstrating to Republi-

cans, *any* effort to grapple with the problem of entitlements is political poison, and Republicans would be only too happy to teach Democrats the same lesson. In fact, since Democrats have positioned themselves as the champions of entitlement programs, they are even more likely to shy away from austerity, so Clinton's life may turn out to be *harder* if his party rules the hill. Divided government might make it easier to solve this political dilemma: If no solution is possible without the cooperation of both parties, then neither party need worry about giving a decisive advantage to the other. Blame and the right to point fingers would be divided more or less equally and responsibility, blissfully, would be at least somewhat obscured.

Unfortunately, divided government would also make it much harder for Clinton to take up the challenges of work and inequality. Take a simple instance: There's a case to be made for the welfare-to-work approach of the welfare reform bill, but only on the assumption that the government guarantees erstwhile recipients day care for their children and jobs at socially adequate wages. Although the president signed the bill, he knows its shortcomings; the Republican Congress would have passed an even more niggardly and draconian bill. Without a Democratic Congress, it will be very hard for the president to do much about correcting the bill's deficiencies.

The welfare bill is typical of the kind of compromises we can expect to see for the next four years. Clinton and Gore are no prizes; they sing the gospel songs of internationalism and new technology, and they often talk as if everything in economic and social life were either hunkydory or heading in that direction. But, just as often, they show that they do know better—as the president did in the first debate by mentioning, however perfunctorily, the need for subsidized welfare-to-work jobs—and Democrats in Congress have been even more likely to recognize the need for a government active in promoting secure employment and decent wages.

On balance, though there are arguments on both sides, the best prospect for the republic probably lies with the outside chance of a Democratic sweep. Despite Bill Clinton's celebrated opportunism, he does tilt toward liberalism—Bob Dole has that part right—so any push in that direction should have at least some effect on his policies. Moreover, the fact that the president is talking about epochal political decisions hints that, unable to run again, Clinton may be a little less responsive to the political wind and a little more concerned about his place in history. In any case, the Democrats should know this year they were lucky; in the future, they can't count on running against Republican mistakes. To *have* a future, much less a bridge to it, Clinton and his party will need to offer a credible promise of democratic renewal.

Wilson Carey McWilliams is a professor of political science at Rutgers University and the author, most recently, of *The Politics of Disappointment: American Elections, 1976-94* (Chatham House).

**R U S S I A**

# After Yeltsin

*With the president governing from a sickbed, the struggle to succeed him is under way.*

By Fred Weir  
MOSCOW

**F**or the first half of this year, Russian state policy and public expectations were driven by the hope that the coming presidential elections would at last settle the vexing issue of power and blaze a path out of the bleak post-Soviet wilderness of collapsing industry, burgeoning crime, plunging incomes, social breakdown, fading democracy and regional war.

President Boris Yeltsin, who has successfully cast every one of Russia's complex political crises since 1991 as the "decisive confrontation" with communism, vowed that all the sacrifices and losses of the market-reform era would begin to pay off once he had vanquished an electoral challenge by the resurgent Communist Party's humdrum leader, Gennady Zyuganov. Yeltsin scattered along the campaign trail some 50 special presidential spending decrees worth an

estimated \$10 billion, designed to immediately redress some of the most glaring popular grievances and to convince voters of his earnest intentions. These included paying the wage arrears of public sector workers, raising pensions and student stipends to survival levels, signing a cease-fire agreement to end the bloody war in Chechnya, and pledging to abolish the hated annual military conscription drive within four years.

Yeltsin trounced Zyuganov by a margin of 54 percent to 40 percent in the second round of elections on July 3. But as Russian autumn plunges toward an early winter, few of those bold springtime hopes survive. The country is drifting almost rudderless through some of the worst economic news, labor unrest and looming political conflict since the demise of the Soviet Union, while Yeltsin lies in a hospital bed—awaiting surgery to correct a heart problem he concealed from the public for years—and his aides jockey for position in the new presidential elections that many believe to be imminent.

Most of Yeltsin's sweeping campaign promises are today little more than bitter memories. With breathtaking cynicism, the Kremlin rescinded virtually all of the special spending decrees shortly after the voting was over. Unpaid public sector wages have reached a record total of almost \$8 billion and are expanding at an estimated rate of 5 percent monthly. Upset by Yeltsin's flip-flop, Russia's traditionally somnolent 50 million-member Federation of Independent Trade Unions is threatening to launch a general strike over the wage issue.

Russia's economic picture is dire. Although inflation has been brought down under 3 percent monthly, near the target set by the International Monetary Fund, the dramatic post-Soviet economic collapse actually accelerated this year. Russia's GDP fell by 6 percent in the first eight months of 1996 compared with the same period last year, far worse than the government's projections. Real wages remain well below the 1991 level, and nearly a third of Russians earn less than the officially designated subsistence level. Investment—the crucial indicator of future economic health—has continued to plummet this year, and is now just 20 percent of its 1989 level in constant prices. Russia is lagging far behind other so-called emerging markets in direct foreign investment, once touted as the country's best hope—attracting just \$2.6 billion in 1995 (compared to China's \$36 billion). Meanwhile, government borrowing has skyrocketed, in part to pay for Yeltsin's lavish election campaign. During the first six months of this year, Russia's internal debt in the form of treasury bill obligations grew by a staggering \$20 billion.

Just hours after the election results were announced, Yeltsin junked the cease-fire he had solemnly negotiated a month earlier and launched a ferocious assault against the





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Chechen rebels. The president then pushed back his order to end conscription to at least the year 2005, a receding horizon that mocks the despair of 215,000 young Russian men currently being rounded up to fill this year's quota of recruits for the crumbling, cash-starved armed forces.

But the single most damaging deceit, which conditions all other calculations in the twilight of the Yeltsin era, is the longtime cover-up of the president's deteriorating health.

In 1993, Yeltsin smashed an uncooperative parliament and rewrote Russia's constitution to concentrate near-absolute power in the president's office. He then proceeded to absent himself for long periods of time, leaving anarchy in the Kremlin and virtual warfare among the overlapping branches of Russia's vast state apparatus. Yeltsin was off work again for five months in 1995, after suffering two heart attacks in succession.

"The key problem of Russian politics today is that Yeltsin's grip on power is slipping due to his health," says Andrei Kortunov, an analyst at Moscow's Institute of Canada-USA Studies. "He is unable to assert strong control, so he tries to set up a balance between several strong aides. But the result is that decision-making is paralyzed by internecine strife."

The Kremlin's chief doctor, Sergei Mironov, recently admitted that Yeltsin was advised before the election campaign opened last February to undergo potentially incapacitating coronary bypass surgery, but decided to postpone the operation and suppress public knowledge of the fact in the interests of winning a second term of office. During the campaign, Yeltsin set a grueling pace for himself—even going so far as to dance a jig onstage with rock musicians—

to convince the public he was fit enough for four more arduous years in the nation's top job.

But as his personal heart specialist, Renat Akchurin, revealed in September, Yeltsin actually suffered another heart attack in early summer, between the first and crucial second round of the presidential election. That fact was concealed, vigorously denied and camouflaged with a blizzard of official disinformation. Journalists who pursued the story were accused of scandal-mongering and serving the interests of communist propaganda.

"Yeltsin might have resigned a year ago, and turned over the job of running this country to a younger, healthier man of his own choosing," says Nikolai Zyubov, an independent political analyst. "He might have spared Russia this ordeal of going leaderless for months at a time and facing a brutal succession struggle. He might have gone into an honorable retirement and lived happily with his family, but like any czar or general secretary of the past he elected to hang on to power with his last breath."

Today Yeltsin rules Russia from a cardiac sanitarium, where he is being prepped for surgery in mid-November at the earliest. The official prognosis, as always, is upbeat. But even so, officials admit that the president is capable of working no more than three hours a day. Three possible scenarios present themselves: Yeltsin has the operation and fully recovers; Yeltsin dies on the operating table; or he decides not to risk surgery.

Assuming Yeltsin has the operation, and fully recovers his strength—considered the least likely of the three possible outcomes—it will be well into 1997 before he is able to resume governing his crisis-ridden country. In the interim,

the government will limp along without strong leadership and plagued by infighting.

Should the president not survive the procedure, Russia's constitution stipulates that his bland and unelected prime minister, Viktor Chernomyrdin, should take over for three months, after which fresh presidential elections must be held. Russia's new elite considers Chernomyrdin the most acceptable successor, but he labors under a multitude of disadvantages, including his association with Yeltsin and public blame for the sad state of Russia's economy, which he has managed for almost four years.

**P**itted against Chernomyrdin in the as-yet-unannounced presidential race is Kremlin security supremo Alexander Lebed, who won 15 percent of the vote in the last election. In the waning days of the campaign, Yeltsin brought Lebed on to his team with promises of vast responsibilities and the nod as heir apparent in hopes of picking up the authoritarian nationalist general's voters. The ploy worked, but Lebed has parlayed his strictly advisory post as chief of the Security Council into a highly credible springboard for an eventual run at Yeltsin's job.

In August, Yeltsin handed Lebed a poisoned chalice: He told him to find a formula to end the Chechnya war, a task that had already eluded the best personal efforts of both Chernomyrdin and Yeltsin. Lebed remarked at the outset that "somebody really wanted me to break my neck on this one." But for weeks he shuttled between Moscow and Chechnya, banged heads together, won respect from the rebels, and finally framed an agreement that acknowledged Russia's defeat by withdrawing federal troops, abandoning the pro-Moscow puppet government and recognizing rebel pre-eminence. The deal evaded the explosive problem of Chechen demands for independence by creating a five-year breathing space to work on a solution.

Lebed's popularity has shot up. Even many liberals now view him as a man of action who single-handedly halted 22 months of senseless carnage in Chechnya, and who promises to bring the same energy to bear on Russia's stubborn economic slump, spiraling crime and endemic official corruption. Forgotten are Lebed's own descriptions of himself as a "semi-democrat" and an ardent admirer of former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet. "People aren't given teeth just to chew with," goes a typical Lebedism. "They need to be shown from time to time. Strength makes the world go around."

Between the dubious prospect of a revived Yeltsin resuming his duties and the specter of tumultuous new elections to replace him, there is a third possibility—which some observers consider most likely—in which Yeltsin neither has the operation nor retires from the stage. Despite the optimistic prognoses of Kremlin doctors and American heart surgeon Michael DeBaakey, who was given brief access to the president, there remains a strong likelihood that after at least three heart attacks and with considerable reported damage to his liver, kidneys and circulatory system, Yeltsin will ultimately be declared inoperable.

In this scenario, Yeltsin may linger in the Kremlin for years, incapable of supervising the vast machinery of power that he created, and yet unchallengeable from any quarter. The Communist-dominated parliament has already begun a process that could eventually have Yeltsin declared unfit to rule on health grounds, but in Russia's current constitutional system any such attempt could be easily vetoed by the Kremlin.

**A** fading Yeltsin would lean heavily on his new chief aide and gatekeeper, Anatoly Chubais, the architect of Russia's deeply corrupt privatization drive and a close friend of many of the country's top bankers and industrialists. The daily *Izvestia* has described Chubais, who reputedly wields a rubber-stamp facsimile of Yeltsin's signature, as "effectively the most powerful man in the country."

"This is what the current elite want—the indefinite extension of the Yeltsin status quo, administered by Chubais," says Sergei Metrokhin, a member of parliament from the liberal Yabloko party. "They want this because under Yeltsin it is very easy for them to acquire property and to bribe their way through officialdom. They are frightened on principle of any new candidate to the throne. A new leader would almost certainly try to mobilize public support by making war on corruption, or at least would help his own friends and backers to grab the best places at the trough."

Whether the close of the Yeltsin era comes with a whimper or a bang, it is clearly imminent. The transition to a new generation of leadership will be, at best, a severe test of Russia's nerves. It will hit a political system that has virtually no resilience and an economy still locked in its steep post-Soviet decline.

"No one is more responsible for the sorry state this country is in than Yeltsin," says Andrei Kolganov, a Moscow University political scientist. "He has squandered Russia's best energies in fruitless and self-glorifying power struggles, scorched the middle ground out of our political spectrum, and made his own survival the indispensable condition of Russian political stability. We could have spent the past five years building a genuine balance of democratic political institutions, but instead we've spent it setting the stage for chaos and dictatorship." ◀

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## FRANCE

# Le Pen's pitchfork populism

**F**rance's homegrown right-wing, racist party, the National Front (FN), is making news again, and as usual the news is cause for public alarm.

*France's far-right National Front is gaining support among the victims of globalization.*

By James Cohen  
PARIS

On September 9, Nicolas Bourgat, a 14-year-old boy, was stabbed to death in the streets of Marseilles by a boy of 15 whom the police identified only as Khtab. The murderer's parents are Moroccan but Khtab, born in France, has French citizenship. Five days later, while Nicolas' funeral was taking place, FN leader Jean-Marie Le Pen led a demonstration in Marseilles to protest against insecurity caused by "foreigners." Neither the mayor of Marseilles nor Nicolas' parents were in favor of bringing race and politics into the tragedy, but Le Pen went ahead with the march just the same.

This event, widely denounced as a scandal, is one sign among many that

the National Front is trying to project an even more radical and racist image than usual. In late August, Le Pen openly declared for the first time his belief in the "inequality of the races," an idea he has reiterated several times since, using questionable humor to hide the insidiousness of his ideas. (How can one deny the inequality of races, he asked, when it is clear that Africans run faster than Europeans in Olympic competition?)

These verbal antics are in a sense nothing new. Le Pen has long since mastered the art of launching shock phrases that remain on everyone's lips for weeks. But what accounts for the sudden intensification of these outrageous acts? The most likely explanation is that Le Pen is trying to galvanize his party's troops for legislative elections to be held in 1998, and possibly earlier. At a party rally on September 14, he called on his followers to make a "revolution" against what he described as France's "rotten" power structure, left and right alike.

As is well known, some of Le Pen's invective has been directed at Jews. One of his aims is to trivialize the memory of the Nazi genocide, which he once described as a "detail" in the history of World War II. Such remarks no doubt reflect the depths of Le Pen's soul, but he has deliberately kept them infrequent. On a day-to-day basis, the staple of FN rhetoric is contempt bordering on hatred toward immigrants from North and West Africa and their French offspring.

This behavior continues to strike most French people as appalling. Most French youth oppose the FN on the basis of solid democratic principles. Anti-racist movements have had a great deal of success in recent years. For many if not most French people, France's identity as a multiethnic society is now taken for granted. Nonetheless, Le Pen has earned the steady loyalty of one voter out of six. The FN, founded in 1972, began surging in the early '80s, when it made electoral breakthroughs in some mid-sized cities. In the 1988 presidential elections, Le Pen garnered 14 percent of the vote, and in 1995 he edged up to 15 percent. The totals are higher still on the Mediterranean coast, in Alsace, and in the industrial suburbs surrounding such large cities as Lyons, Lille and Paris.

Although absent from parliament for the time being, the FN is present as a vociferous minority in a large number of city councils, police union locals, public sector tenants' associations, and even departmental and regional councils. In 1994 three sizable towns in the south of France—Toulon, Orange and Marignane—elected FN mayors.

Although Le Pen has brooked no sustained opposition from would-be rivals within his party, the FN's success does not boil down to one charismatic individual. The FN has become a deeply ramified organization and a permanent

part of the political landscape in France. It has developed not only a solid apparatus of bureaucrat-activists, but even a battery of intellectuals who fill a theoretical journal called *Identities* with justifications for the FN's ideas on race, culture and French sovereignty.

Beginning in the mid-'80s Le Pen became a frequent guest on TV interview shows. His flair for the dramatic won him high ratings and made him popular with TV journalists, who turned him into a national personality. Clearly, his easy access to national audiences helped to "create the monster."

One reason for Le Pen's appeal is his use of scapegoats to explain away people's socioeconomic woes. Studies by political scientists show that Le Pen's support is strongest among downwardly mobile employees, wage workers, shopkeepers and the unemployed. In the south of France, many people from these walks of life are former French residents of Algeria whose resentment against North African Arabs has colonial roots.

Unemployment in France is officially over 12 percent. Urban violence is mild by U.S. standards but continues to rise. Health benefits and other social services provided by the state are still generous compared to the United States, but they have been progressively nibbled away over the past decade. Poverty has been on the rise since the early '80s. The current conservative government has targeted many public services for austerity and privatization measures in an effort to prepare France, in excessive haste, for the single European currency, which is due to take effect in 1999.

Not unlike Pat Buchanan in the United States, Le Pen makes a simple kind of sense to many victims of the crisis when he calls for preserving the prerogatives of the French nation in the midst of globalization and European integration. When he dismisses both the left and right as defenders of financial privilege at the expense of "ordinary" Frenchmen, the message rings true for many. It cannot be forgotten that under 14 years of a socialist president (including 10 under socialist prime ministers), the government took no decisive steps to reverse the trend toward greater economic inequality, preferring timid measures to repair the damage already done.

More than ever, the FN is presenting itself as the "one alternative" to politics as usual and the economics of adaptation to globalizing capitalism. Its social and economic program, however, is far from clear; party leaders appear to be divided over how much public service and social protection to conserve. The FN pays much lip service to the plight of ordinary working people, but Le Pen has always been suspicious of organized labor. The one clear idea in the FN's program is the notion of "national preference," which means that state benefits should go to nationals rather than foreigners, who are seen as parasites on the French nation.

In this respect, too, Le Pen can be usefully compared with Pat Buchanan and his anti-immigrant vituperation. One major difference, however, is that Le Pen's politics are root-

ed in a European current of right-wing authoritarianism tending markedly toward fascism.

Le Pen's recent outbursts brought him and the FN a barrage of denunciation. Prime Minister Alain Juppé called Le Pen a "racist, anti-Semite and xenophobe" in front of a high school audience. President Jacques Chirac, emerging from the Auschwitz concentration camp on September 3 while on a state visit to Poland, made statements before French TV cameras condemning ideologies of hatred and exclusion, clearly targeting Le Pen.

With his declarations about race last month, Le Pen was consciously mocking French legal authorities. It is against the law in France to engage in defamation of specific ethnic groups, nations, races or religions, and Le Pen has been convicted on several occasions of breaking this law. His recent remarks, however, were of a more general character and could not be considered illegal. Nonetheless, Justice Minister Jacques Toubon lost no time in finding a way around the problem. On September 14, he announced his intention to send to parliament an even tougher bill that would cover, in his words, "not just incitement to racial hatred, but the intention to incite such hatred, even if it is indirect."

In spite of its strong verbal and legislative riposte, the government's stance on the FN is ambiguous. Only a few days prior to Le Pen's outburst, Juppé announced his intention to promote new electoral rules that would bring in a "dose" of proportional representation for the next elections to the National Assembly. This measure, which was later rejected by leaders of Juppé's own party, was clearly calculated to help the governing conservative coalition keep its majority in the next legislative elections by submitting larger urban districts to proportional representation while allowing rural districts—often conservative—to maintain simple majority rule. Such a change would certainly have resulted in the election of a group of FN representatives, and Juppé appeared willing to take this risk. The FN has not had a single parliamentary seat since 1988, when France scrapped a limited proportional representation scheme briefly adopted under President François Mitterrand.

Some political leaders, mostly on the right, have yielded to the temptation of stealing a portion of the FN's program on immigration in hopes of holding on to potential FN supporters. The most blatant examples of this were the three laws passed in 1993 at the initiative of then-Minister of the Interior Charles Pasqua. These laws impose important restrictions on legal as well as illegal immigrants. For example, children of immigrants born on French soil must now wait until age 18 to claim French citizenship. They are thus treated as foreigners for the first years of their lives and may even be deported for a single misdemeanor. Another law made France's liberal policy on asylum for refugees more restrictive, modifying the French constitution in the process. Finally, police were given more leeway to carry out identity checks in the street. It is well known that those who "look" foreign are subjected to such checks much



more frequently than whites.

The FN, of course, mocks Pasqua's measures as a "cheap imitation" of its own program. But clearly these laws would never have been passed had the FN itself not succeeded in bringing hot-button, anti-immigrant politics into the mainstream.

With left and right now looking more alike than different, hope for a better future is at a low ebb in France. Many current reports describe a "morosity" taking hold of French society. And it is on this morosity that the FN thrives. Its right-wing, ethnic-based nationalism will continue to prosper unless other political forces come forward with a convincing alternative vision.

The governing right has no such project. In spite of Chirac's campaign rhetoric in 1993 about "healing the social fracture," most French voters see no salvation in current conservative policies. Juppé's Reaganite tax policies are transparently inequalitarian. His determination to ram through austerity measures in spite of immense popular resistance (such as last year's public sector strike) has not escaped most voters.

The right is in a great state of disarray at present. After the next legislative elections, the left may find itself obliged to govern again. But the left has yet to come forth with anything like a convincing program for restoring and reinforcing the welfare state. True, a much healthier atmosphere of coexistence than ever before reigns between different "families" on the left: Socialists, Communists, Trotskyists and Greens. But these forces have been unable to define a strategy for guiding French society through the stormy and uncharted globalization process, characterized by a nearly unchecked domination of private and unregulated economic interests.

The left's strategic paralysis has much to do with the fact that Socialist Party leaders, along with most leaders of the mainstream right, are prisoners of a scenario for European integration that works systematically against any efforts to preserve France's tradition of public service and social welfare.

A minority on both the left and the right reject this blind adherence to building the European Union come what may, but their point of view gets woefully little media attention. In their view, European integration is not a bad thing in itself, but it should not come at the expense of the social equilibrium of French society.

Many voters agree with this proposition when it is stated to them clearly, but only Le Pen, who bellows where others merely speak, is actually getting the message across. Much energy is being spent to combat overt racism in France, but little or nothing is being done to halt the socioeconomic processes that supply the National Front with more resentful and frustrated recruits every day. ◀

James Cohen teaches political science at the University of Paris-VIII (Saint-Denis).

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# I N T H E A R T S

## Left for Dade

*Russ Hexter's  
new film  
documents the  
travails of a  
small  
working-class  
town—or  
does it?*

By Pat Dowell

# D

adetown is a place that seems to exist in the mists of memory, even to its residents. The folks who have lived there for decades, most of whom make paper clips and staples at the Gorman Metal Bending Facility, think it's a typical heartland town, the essence of America. To the newcomers, young professionals and their families who have recently moved in with a high-tech firm called API, it's hardly a real town at all, but rather an ideal—the small town where everyone imagines they grew up. It means security, family and stability to them, and that's what they're going to get from it even if it means razing the town to the ground and rebuilding from scratch. The film crew that comes to capture the town on film for a public television show finds a conflict brewing between the old

and the new in Dadetown. Sensing a story, the crew extends the project and records the tug of war between Dadetown's richer new residents and its working-class old-timers.

The resulting documentary chronicles a funny and appalling clash between social classes over whose town Dadetown is. The conflict exemplifies the quest for theme-park family values that leads alienated young moderns to try to forge artificial, picture-perfect communities out of the slightly imperfect ones that already exist. The story of Dadetown is almost too good to be true.

Actually, it *is* too good to be true.

The movie is a clever hoax, staged and scripted by ad man Russ Hexter. According to the production notes, much of the dialogue was improvised—on Hexter's themes—by the largely non-professional cast of upstate New Yorkers. If so, set aside three Oscars for the village women who sit on a park bench and speculate about the actual name of the vague telecommunications firm API. "Associated Prevaricators Incorporated," offers one. "Alien Persons Invade," says her pal. "Area Pillaging Institute," giggles the third. The

cameraman informs them that it's American Peripheral Imaging. "Sounds like our kids had better have good educations if they're gonna have jobs there," comes the reply. After two and a half years, the Dadetowners still don't know what API really does. They do learn that API's move to the town is an example of a corporate policy termed "tactical isolated re-location." The API families love the idea of a small town but not the reality, and their eagerness to bring in such improvements as cappuccino bars and a Pizza Hut ensures that they remain isolated from the earthier concerns of the villagers. As one barstool philosopher warns about API's penchant for formal business attire, "Suits. Nothing'll spook a deer quicker."

Dadetown's divisions are a little too dramatic and facile to be completely convincing, and if the laugh-out-loud comments (or reviews like this one) don't tip you off early to Hexter's prank, there are a few scattered anomalies that give hints of the hoax. One old-timer lovingly recalls the apocryphal "B-43" warplanes that came off the Gorman WW II assembly



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**Dadetown**  
Directed by Russ Hexter



line, and the slacker haircut sported by the callow public relations guy for API (the one who pines for a Pizza Hut) is something no corporate professional could get away with. But by and large, director Hexter—maybe thanks to his background filming commercials—has perfect pitch when it comes to counterfeiting the absurdly real.

Hexter deftly mixes his staged and improvised scenes and dialogue with real details of life in Hammondsport, N.Y., the little Finger Lakes town he used as a backdrop and where he recruited most of his cast. The town's residents have seen their fair share of Yuppies, since the lakes are a prime tourist spot and Hammondsport is a gateway to one of the area's crowded winery tours. In Hammondsport, the firemen really do sweep the streets with hoses once a year, as seen in *Dadetown*. And there are real memories of fine old flying crates, for the town is the home of the Curtiss Jenny and houses a museum of the old planes. Perhaps the plane factory in Hammondsport inspired the glorious past of the Gorman Metal Bending Facility in the film.

That glorious past, in fact, is *Dadetown*'s undoing. The longtime residents resist even the tiniest change, despite the fact that they live in the path of a bulldozer culture, and the new citizens are determined to make the town conform to an idea of the past that is as unreal as the movie. Inevitably, change comes forcibly in the form of layoffs and then a looming shutdown at the factory. A ragged strike is organized with perfectly staged spontaneity. While the plant managers chant the mantra of global competition, the API contingent steps into the breach, seeking to fill a natural power vacuum in the fractured community with a shrewd and condescending barrage of corporate good will. The movie is particularly strong in capturing the unctuous but irresistible false community spirit with which the new *Dadetowners* take over. The nice folks of the heartland are turned rather too easily, however, into surly villagers marching on the castle with the equivalent of pitchforks and torches. All to no avail, of course, and with violent and disheartening results. One of the problems inherent in creating a fashionable fiction that seems "typical" of the American dilemma is that it will probably be cloaked in typically hip despair as well.

Though *Dadetown* ranks with the great stunts of moviemaking, it is not much more, finally, than a stunt. At



times it is as unexpectedly moving as Woody Allen's 1983 sleight-of-hand documentary *Zelig*, in which Allen played a human chameleon who had insert-

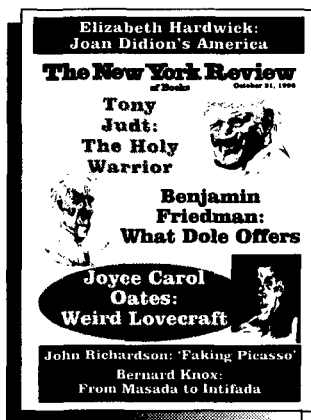
ed himself into most of the early 20th century's historic moments. And it is as funny and sly a send-up of film-fan sincerity as Rob Reiner's deliriously reverent chronicle of fictitious and ill-fated headbangers, *This is Spinal Tap* (1984). Those mock documentaries were made more than a decade ago, however, so fooling the filmgoer with fiction posing as earnest fact hardly breaks new ground.

Nowadays, independents who want to put social commentary on film or document the plight of real communities disappearing into the mists of engineered nostalgia can scarcely find any resources for funding, or theaters that will book their films. It seems pointless and a little sophomoric to mock this disappearing species of film for its ambition to say something worthwhile about the world that does exist beyond the set—especially when the ridicule is as precisely crafted and as entertaining an inside joke as *Dadetown*. Adding a layer of poignancy to the whole odd enterprise is the fate of director Russ Hexter, who died unexpectedly from an aortic aneurysm shortly after *Dadetown* made a successful debut at Sundance earlier this year. He was only 27, and *Dadetown* was his first feature film. It's tantalizing—and more than a little sad—to wonder what kind of filmmaker he might have grown up to be. ◀

A real-life factory worker plays an imaginary factory worker in Russ Hexter's *Dadetown*.

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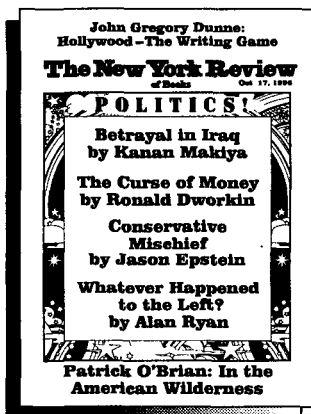
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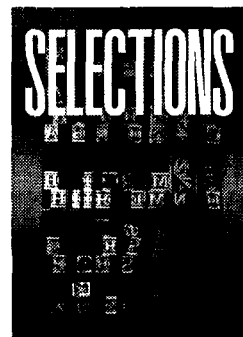
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# IN PRINT

## Who killed health care?

By Colin Gordon

In early 1992, the Clinton administration proposed a sweeping "Health Security" plan that promised to expand coverage to the uninsured and dampen health care inflation. Two years later, any pretense of health reform was dead. And today, Bob Dole routinely grasps at the failed health plan as evidence of the administration's devotion to wasteful big government.

Dole is right, but not (as he would have it) because the health episode represented public rejection of Clinton's secret "liberal agenda." The health reform effort captured both the essential conservatism of the Clinton White House and the stark limits of national politics. The Clinton health plan was a catalogue of exemptions, tax breaks and subsidies for business; hollow promises of increased coverage for the uninsured and underinsured; much political stroking of the medical profession; and a virtual abdication of federal responsibility and initiative to large insurers. It was more a list of suggestions than a solution, a legislative tack that (as one critic noted) came "close to handing blank paper to special interest lobbyists and saying, 'Hey, you do it.'"

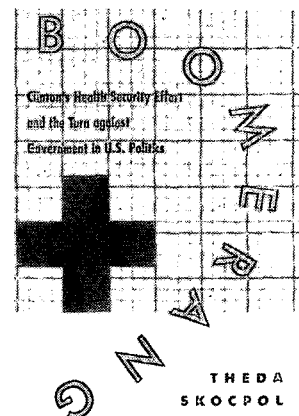
In this sense, the collapse of the Clinton plan reflected less the ability of conservatives or health interests to kill a popular reform proposal than it did the competition of those interests in crafting the proposal in the first place, their scramble for legislative advantage, and their willingness to pull the plug once it became clear that the administration's shifting combination of cost controls, employer mandates and public insurance pools created as many anxieties as it was designed to address. The debate of 1992-1994 was a partisan charade in which Republicans and Democrats (in different ways) sought to speak to public demand for far-reaching reform while acting on the demands of those—most critically the insurance industry—with more substantial stakes in the health care system.

In *Boomerang*, Theda Skocpol dissects the corpse of the Clinton health plan. While many of the bloody scraps are interesting or revealing, her post-mortem is incomplete and

misleading—in large part because she never seems to notice that the corpse itself is a sort of Frankenstein's monster patched together from the offerings of insurers and doctors and employers. In Skocpol's view, the administration was simply caught between contradictory political considerations. On the one hand, both public support for universal coverage and its fiscal advantages pressed the administration to pursue expansive reform. On the other, the budgetary legacy of the '80s, reflected in public anxieties about new spending and the fiscal constraints enforced by the Congressional Budget Office, forced the administration to expand coverage either at the expense of other programs (Medicaid) or "off budget" in the form of employer mandates. Attempting to juggle these demands, the White House became preoccupied with the arcane details of an ultimately monstrous (1,342-page) bill. It also complicated the task of mobilizing support, and invited an anti-government backlash that both defeated health reform and rolled out a red carpet for Republican challengers in the 1994 elections. All of this is true, but it is a little like examining a gunshot victim and then listing the cause of death as "a big hole in the chest." Yes, but who fired the shot and why?

Skocpol's account of the 1992-1994 debate reflects an "institutionalist" approach to political history, especially to the development of social programs, refined over the last 15 years. In the early '80s, Skocpol challenged the analytical assumptions of both liberal historians and radical state theorists. Liberal historians, she argued, offered either simple narratives or grand abstractions ("national values") that could not explain the comparative exceptionalism of the American welfare state. State theorists, she said, offered a bleak choice between the "structural" view that state welfare policies "kicked in" automatically (like a trusty air conditioner) to chill class conflict or the "instrumental" view that state welfare policies simply reflected the willingness and ability of farsighted capitalists to use the state to pursue their private ends. Instead, Skocpol suggested, social scientists should "bring the state back in" by paying closer attention to political institutions, their autonomy from economic interests, and their independent capacity (or incapacity) to shape policy.

This approach was not without its critics. For many, Skocpol's implausible contention that capitalists did not shape the emergence of Ameri-



**Boomerang: Clinton's Health Security Effort and the Turn Against Government in U.S. Politics**

By Theda Skocpol  
W.W. Norton  
& Company  
230 pp., \$27.50

can social policies rested on a caricature of neo-marxist state theory. For others, the “new institutionalism” she championed virtually ignored a generation of social history that suggested the ways in which social protest, public policy and the very language of reform were shaped by the uniquely American intersection of race, class and gender. In later work, most notably her 1992 opus *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers*, Skocpol hardened her dismissal of economic interests while halfheartedly accommodating the influence of other “politically active groups.” The result was a subtle shift from a “state-centered” account to a “polity-centered” account in which both state institutions and other political actors (except economic interests) would be considered. This retreat continues in *Boomerang*, in which everyone is either an institutional player or a “stakeholder,” and the outcome is determined by a sort of elaborate tournament of dueling political capacities.

There are three basic flaws in her account. First and foremost is Skocpol’s dismissal of the role of economic interests in the struggle over the Clinton plan. This was a debate in which even the mainstream press routinely tallied up the lobbying expenses and campaign contributions of health interests, and yet Skocpol doesn’t introduce us to the insurance industry until page 134—and then only to bury its influence in a chorus of (largely ideological) conservative reaction. She tends to lump together insurers, employers and doctors as “stakeholders” or “ideological opponents” of reform. The ability of such interests to mobilize against reform is understood not in terms of the notorious centrality of money in American politics, but rather as the tendency of “professional staff-led advocacy and interest organizations” to displace party politics with a sort of “hyperpluralism” of competing interest groups.

This not only seriously distorts the relative influence of those who supported or opposed health reform through 1992-1994, but it also misses the extent to which those interests were able to shape the very premises of Clinton’s plan. Since the early ’70s, the health care debate has reflected the slow collapse of a corporate compromise between providers (insurers and doctors) and payers (insurers and employers). Health care inflation and the threat of political

intervention set insurers against employers on the issue of cost control, set big business against small business on the question of employer mandates, set big insurers against small insurers on the question of managed care, and left doctors poised uneasily between the frying pan of “socialized medicine” and the fire of HMOs. These interests set the boundaries for the debate, just as their organizational confusion, shifting preferences and leeriness of political intrusion ensured that the debate would shrink from any substantial reform. In the absence of a consistent programmatic vision, health reform wandered aimlessly, finally losing itself in the task of satisfying competing interests without offending any of them. Skocpol misses all of this by mistaking the confusion and anxiety of health interests for a lack of influence, and by ignoring the ways in which these interests not only responded to Clinton’s initiative but—through their influence in Congress, their patronage of policy groups like the “Jackson Hole” crowd, and their other natural political advantages—were largely responsible for it in the first place.

Skocpol’s second major mistake is her emphasis on “Reagan’s revenge,” the fiscal hangover from the ’80s. While the Reagan deficits did make existing social programs harder to defend and new ones virtually unthinkable, the Clinton plan’s reliance on private insurance and employer mandates had more complex historical roots. In large part, the devotion to employment-based insurance reflected the “contributory” logic of American social provision. The 1935 Social Security Act distinguished sharply between job-based pension and unemployment programs that rested on individual contributions and payroll taxes, and relatively meager and stigmatized “welfare” programs (ADC, later AFDC) financed out of general revenues. In this “two-track” welfare system, the prospect of national health care has always been a riddle: Health care (unlike pensions) clearly has little to do with employment, but any talk of expanding coverage beyond insurable employees raises the specter (with all its class and racial overtones) that “my” contributions would pay for “your” care. Health care also violates the contractual logic of Social Security and unemployment insurance because, as opponents have always pointed out, all would make contributions while only the sick would reap the benefits.

Debates over health care in the ’30s, the ’40s and the ’70s were routinely centered around the conviction that programs funded through individual contributions would both ensure that “deserving” citizens were entitled to benefits and pay for themselves. In reality, of course, the “off-budget” health care system of employment-based insurance that has flourished since the ’40s is enormously expensive: The federal government both subsidizes private coverage by maintaining the tax-deductibility (for employers) of private insurance and mops up (under Medicaid and Medicare) some of the high-risk pool left behind. Given the widespread recognition that a single-payer system could deliver both universal coverage and substantial savings, the Reagan legacy is less relevant than it first appears; the deficit

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should have strengthened, not weakened, the argument for thoroughgoing reform. I can muster little sympathy for Clinton's budgetary dilemma—except to argue that it was much more than that. The failure of health care reform reflected a longstanding fascination with “contributory” social provision that distinguished sharply between “deserving” and “undeserving” citizens, tied social provision inextricably to the “family wage” employment of white men, and stigmatized universal programs. Under these conditions, a less-than-universal welfare state is unlikely to expand its reach, and likely to retreat in the face of fiscal constraints and cultural backlash.

Finally, Skocpol is surprisingly uncritical of the Clinton plan itself. The argument that supporters and allies were simply slow and sloppy in mobilizing support assumes that there was something worth supporting. Skocpol overlooks the fundamental problems inherent in the White House's increasingly ambivalent pursuit of “comprehensive reform,” “universally inclusive reform,” “guaranteed private insurance,” or “inclusive managed competition.” The shotgun

marriage of cost controls and employer mandates that the administration finally arrived at not only pleased none of the health interests it catered to, it also savaged the basic principles of real reform.

Perhaps most importantly, the Clinton plan never acknowledged that the interwoven crises of runaway costs and shrinking coverage are direct consequences of private insurance and employment provision. Private health insurance is increasingly an organized retreat from the very idea of “insurance”—shared risk—as private insurers fragment the insurance pool and raise the social costs by minimizing their own liabilities. The administrative costs of doing this, of course, account for the lion's share of America's “runaway” health costs. Job-based insurance, for its part, has always confused the administrative convenience of distributing and paying for health care at the workplace with the justice of doing so. It assumes that the distribution of jobs is fair, that the distribution of jobs with benefits is fair, and that there is a logical connection between employment status and access to health care. In short, the Clinton plan proposed reforming the health care system by cementing and building upon its two principal flaws: reliance on private insurance and employment provision. It was (to borrow a phrase from conservative critics) like moving furniture into a burning house.

Given these constraints, it was inevitable that the Clinton plan would quickly and quietly abandon universal coverage. “Since most Americans have insurance,” argued a private strategy memo (whose importance is downplayed by Skocpol), “they think of the uninsured as ‘them’—this creates an ‘us vs. them’ mentality. We should not even talk about ‘37 million uninsured’ because that is not who the proposal is designed to protect.”

On these terms, single-payer advocates were quite right to oppose the Clinton plan, and to ignore Skocpol's retrospective advice that the reform coalition “needed all hands enthusiastically on deck and prepared for difficult maneuvers if the ship of inclusive health care reform was going to make it.” From the beginning, the “ship of reform” was full of holes, headed in the wrong direction, and guided by the often contradictory navigational advice of employers, insurers and doctors. ◀

Colin Gordon teaches American history at the University of Iowa. He is the author of *Dead on Arrival: The Clinton Health Plan* (Open Magazine, New Party Papers) and *New Deals: Business, Labor, and Politics, 1920-1935* (Cambridge, 1994).



# Mike from Michigan

By Jeffrey L. Reynolds

**B**y his own admission, Michael Moore was the perfect all-American boy. He was born in the shadows of a General Motors plant, became an Eagle Scout and believed in God, country and the NRA, which once gave him a marksmanship award. He attended the seminary in hopes of becoming a priest, never smoked a joint—much less inhaled—and was elected to public office by the tender age of 18. Moore seemed destined to end up in either the marble corridors of corporate America or the wood-paneled halls of the Beltway elite. And so he has, but not exactly by invitation. In fact, he's one of the guys that CEOs and House Speakers have come to fear most. They scan the crowd for his trademark baseball hat, rumpled figure and devilish grin as they step from their limousines, praying to God he's still off chasing Roger.

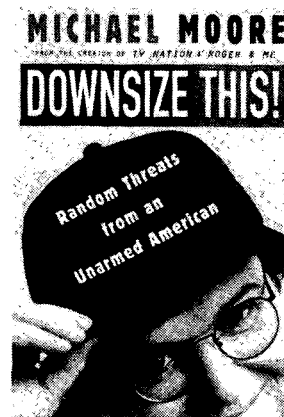
For two and a half years, Moore tried to track down elusive GM chairman Roger Smith to find out why, despite record company profits, he pink-slipped 30,000 workers and decimated Moore's hometown of Flint, Mich. Smith's army of rent-a-cops, PR flacks and Armani-clad bureaucrats ultimately prevailed, but the irrepressibly impish Moore got the last laugh as he chronicled his relentless quest in *Roger & Me*—a 1989 film that remains the most popular documentary of all time.

His subsequent forays on to the big screen have met with mixed results. *Pets or Meat: The Return to Flint* received critical acclaim, but Alan Alda and John Candy couldn't save the hapless *Canadian Bacon*, an instantly forgotten 1995 satire about a fight between Canada and a bored United States. But even the highbrow Hollywood set loved the biting satire, in-your-face social commentary and irreverent wit of *TV Nation*. For two summer seasons—1994 on NBC and 1995 on Fox—the mischievous Moore had us playing Frisbee with Jack Kevorkian, scoping out bargain real estate deals in Love Canal, and standing outside IBM's towering headquarters with a bullhorn challenging corporate execs to come down and prove their ability to format a disk. All that

Emmy Award-winning rabble-rousing must have made network suits a bit nervous; although Moore has secured funding for a third season (from the BBC), it's still not clear if any U.S. outlet will pick it up. Fans hungry for relief from the lobotomized fall lineup should drop Fox a note, but not before picking up *Downsize This! Random Threats from an Unarmed American*.

With this, his first book, Moore is back with a vengeance, delivering a stinging indictment of the economic, political and social lunacy that will probably keep more than 100 million Americans—about 60 percent of the eligible voting population—away from the polls on November 5. He good-naturedly trounces Bob Dole, Newt Gingrich, Jesse Helms and an impressive roster of corporate America's biggest “welfare Mamas,” while simultaneously bringing a breath of fresh air to a campaign season laden with half-assed promises, nauseating commercials and boring tell-all best-sellers. Whether he's recounting Rep. Bob Dornan's episodes of insanity to a psychiatric center nurse, outlining innovative ways to sneak into the United States, writing campaign contribution checks on behalf of Abortionists for Buchanan and Satan Worshipers for Dole, or trying to convince the Commerce Department to move to Mexico, he's having a good time—something American politics desperately needs.

“What is Terrorism?” Moore asks in the opening pages of the book, then answers his own question with two stunningly similar pictures of the bombed-out Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City and the remnants of a partially demolished factory in Flint. He notes with irony that the Ryder truck, the current vehicle of choice for frustrated terrorists, is the same vehicle used to cart around the belongings of nomadic Americans displaced, downsized and disemployed by CEOs who have been rewarded with ever more stratospheric salaries. Take AT&T chairman Robert Allen, who pink-slipped 40,000 workers and made \$116 million, or Scott Paper CEO Albert “Chainsaw Al” Dunlap, who fired 11,100 people, merged with Kimberly-Clark and awarded himself \$100 million. Readers can only hope that what goes around comes around when they learn that for every 1 percent increase in the jobless rate, homicides increase by 6.7 percent, violent crimes by 3.4 percent and property crimes by 2.4 percent. The only surprise is that truck bombings and post-office-style workplace murders aren't more common—if you were a laid-off Scott Paper employee, wouldn't you be tempted to



**Downsize This! Random Threats from an Unarmed American**  
By Michael Moore  
Crown Publishers  
288 pp., \$21

take matters into your own hands?

If you're still employed, your wallet probably seems a bit thinner this year. That's because we each kicked in an average of \$1,388 to the \$170 billion federal ADC (that's Aid to Dependent Corporations, not children) program that supports Lockheed Martin, Archer Daniels Midland, Mercedes-Benz and Sears, Roebuck. It's safe to say that Moore is speaking for millions when he tells the balding corporate villains profiled in his series of Corporate Crook Trading Cards, "Get off your lazy corporate ass and find new ways to employ Americans, clean up our air and water, and pay your fair share in taxes—or we're going to run your CEO and his cronies off to jail."

The 20 million Americans who are currently unemployed or earning below poverty-level wages aren't the only ones entitled to Moore's sympathy. Going the pro-life movement one better, he devotes one chapter to an impassioned defense of sperm.

Though the arguments aren't quite as compelling as those for displaced workers, they're every bit as amusing. "As a man," he writes, "I can tell you from firsthand observation that billions and billions of sperm are being senselessly slaughtered each and every day." Highlighting sperm's role as the very first building block of life, Moore condemns the masturbators/killers who fail to hear "the silent screams of these little babies as their fathers mindlessly dispose of them in a Kleenex" and tries to enlist the help of the National Right to Life Committee in his crusade. Intriguingly named RTL spokesman Christian Polking expresses personal support for a Save the Sperm campaign, but eventually balks at organizational involvement. Moore hangs up the phone empty-handed, so to speak.

Militias seem to be in vogue these days, so Moore spends his final chapter plugging "Mike's Militia—a sort of all-purpose group for the firearm-challenged." Big, hairy Ted Nugent-looking guys carrying guns need not apply. If you're interested, you must be willing to: Do to the Democratic Party what the Christian Coalition has done to the Republicans; descend on state and national capitals to push for increased protections from corporate America; boycott companies that downsize for profit; work to open abortion clinics in the 80 percent of the country that has none; deliver AFL-CIO cards to 7-11 clerks throughout the country; produce a cable access show that doesn't look like shit; and use

that www thing to organize others. It's an amusing concept, but also a serious call to action from a not-so-serious guy.

Moore has an uncanny knack for pissing people off, an uncommon ability to make them laugh, and an almost unnatural gift to make them think. He's as cherubic as Ralph Reed, as populist as Ross Perot and as passionate as Pats

Buchanan and Robertson. Most important, he's seized and tried to build

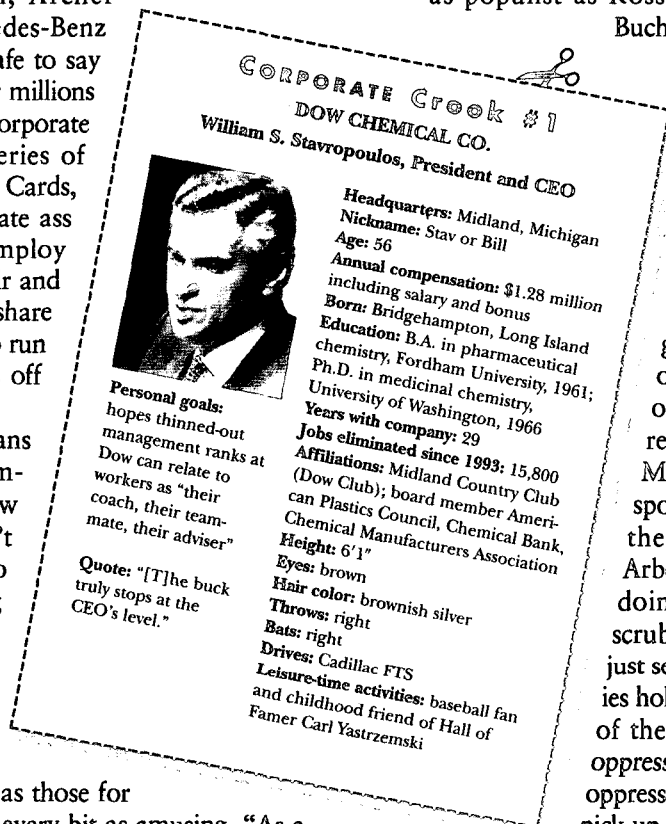
upon America's roots of discontent and defiance in a way that the head-shaking, hand-wringing gloom and doom left hasn't. His growing popularity is proof positive that Americans love leftist ideas but hate a stale, sputtering and dying movement that's out of touch and growing more irrelevant each day. In one of the book's many half-humorous, half-affecting passages, Moore relates his discovery that Mark from Michigan, the notorious militia spokesman, is, in real life, a janitor at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. "What is the left in Ann Arbor doing while Mark from Michigan is scrubbing their floors and toilets? I can just see it now—all the groovy nineties lefties holding their PC meetings in Room 305 of the student union, talking about the oppressed masses and not even noticing the oppressed Mark from Michigan who has to pick up their half-empty Starbucks cups filled with soaked cigarette butts. Mark needs some

help, but he's an invisible man to this crowd."

No wonder Clinton campaigns with a centrist triangulation strategy that cynically ignores the needs of working people: They have nowhere else to go. But if there's no left alternative to the Democrats in this country, it's not for lack of a constituency. Moore reminds us that Jane and Joe Six-pack are more open-minded—and much more pissed off—than we give them credit for.

The same workers who shouted "Take this Job and Shove it" in the '60s and '70s when unemployment rates were low and unions were strong are now seething in silence as they work longer hours for fewer dollars under worsening conditions. There are no jobs to shove and launching a workplace rebellion or telling your boss where to go as you head out the door to the unemployment office has become a bit impractical. But that doesn't mean workers are acquiescing in their plight. While a simplistic anthem updated for the post-NAFTA '90s won't win our jobs back, it might help to relieve frustration, fear and despair. Sure, "Downsize This!" bellowed in conjunction with the obligatory crotch-grab seems kind of crude, but it sure beats mowing down your bosses with a semiautomatic.

Jeffrey L. Reynolds is a freelance writer based in New York.



## Health care

*Continued from page 16*

incurred by the provisions concerning the MSAs, long-term care insurance and advisory opinions, the bill added a subtitle on expatriation taxes, which declared that expatriates must only pay U.S. taxes on their U.S. income. To explain how this tax break was in fact revenue-generating, the JCT claimed that, by giving in to expatriates, the subtitle would provide a smaller incentive for early expatriation. Thus, billionaires would expatriate later and pay higher expatriation taxes when they did.

**W**hen the House finished its job on the bill in March, it appeared that their bundle of deals had wrecked any chance of the bill's final passage. In particular, the mainstream press reported that the House's MSA provisions for Golden Rule were a deal-breaker. Kassebaum and Kennedy both rejected the MSA provisions. However, with presidential elections pending, the White House wanted some sort of a bill to shield it from charges that the president promised action and did nothing on health insurance.

With the White House calling for a compromise, Kennedy entered into negotiations with House Republicans. On July 25, they reached an agreement. On MSAs, Kennedy and House Republicans settled on a provision that would supposedly put a cap of 750,000 on the number of MSAs that could be sold. The mechanism for enforcing this agreement, however, appears so weak that many on Capitol Hill believe that millions of policies could be sold before the limit kicks in. Kennedy also managed to knock out a few additional pieces of pork that the Republicans had inserted in the bill when it was in the House, but the MSAs and all the payoffs described above were still in it. The HIAA's reaction said it all. "Overall," said HIAA President Willis Gradison, "we think it is a very good bill."

Some House Democrats were unhappy with the bill, but they were pressured by the White House into voting for it. Back in 1994, when the Clinton Health Security Act was under consideration, Reps. Pat Williams (D-MT) and Pete Stark (D-CA) chaired the only two House committees that passed major health insurance reform bills. This August, Williams and Stark were the only two members of the House who voted against the Kassebaum-Kennedy bill. "This bill is not a bold first step," Williams said. "It is a final, sad stumble toward the pretense of health reform." The Senate then unanimously approved the bill.

The Kassebaum-Kennedy bill has made the chances of significant expansion of health insurance even more remote. It reflects the weakness of the Democrats' advocacy on behalf of the uninsured. Not only were Democrats satisfied with the smallest of extensions of coverage, they were willing to get it at the price of big rewards for corporate interests with deep pockets. ◀

**Ramón Castellblanch** teaches and studies health policy at the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health.

## Wellstone

*Continued from page 19*

was the reverse; 46 percent said they would vote for Boschwitz while only 38 percent chose Wellstone.

And so it now appears that Wellstone—who has often expressed his disdain for politics-by-soundbite—has decided to fight fire with fire. In mid-September, his campaign announced it had retained Mandy Grunwald, a key operative in Bill Clinton's 1992 campaign whose résumé also includes the effort to unseat Sen. Bob Packwood (R-OR) ("If your boss stuck his tongue down your throat, would he keep his job?" one of her ads asked.) Shortly after she came on, the Wellstone campaign unveiled its first openly negative ad, blasting Boschwitz for voting to increase his Senate pay. "It may not be what people expected of us," acknowledges a Wellstone strategist. "But it's what we had to do in the face of the million-dollar sleaze coming at us."

**P**ragmatic as the decision to hire Grunwald may have been, her arrival marks the end of something a lot of people had hoped for. "For a while, it looked as if this might be a different kind of campaign," says Steven Schier, a Carleton College political science professor who once taught alongside Wellstone. "The most surprising thing is that this has turned into a cookie-cutter campaign, not much different from what's going on all over the country. The news is that there is nothing new."

All of which, of course, doesn't mean it's over for Wellstone. While he's changed his tune on tactical points, he remains unapologetic about his populist positions—positions that, he's betting, still appeal to a substantial portion of the electorate. He also still has the strongest grass-roots field organization ever in Minnesota, and possibly in the country, along with a voter-registration drive of unprecedented proportions. Not to mention massive, targeted phone-bank efforts, door-knocking and barnstorming—all the trappings of the kind of grass-roots campaigning whose poster child Wellstone has been for the past six years. "This is better than 1990," gushes one veteran worker when asked to compare the two campaigns, "because now we've got the resources."

It's only on rare occasions, and privately, that Wellstone's most avid supporters bring up the possibility that precisely those resources, and what it took to get them, will prove his undoing. As everyone who's taken a close look at the 1990 numbers knows, the margin for victory came in large part from a group hardly any poll ever measures: People who didn't vote before or since, who normally vote for third-party candidates, or who simply pulled the lever for Wellstone because he seemed, somehow, different. If they don't choose to come back this time—if, that is, they are turned off by what seems like yet another campaign-as-usual—it won't be just the senator's political career that has ended. ◀

**Monika Bauerlein** is managing editor of the Minneapolis/St. Paul alternative weekly *City Pages*.



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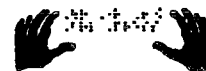
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*Continued from page 40*

more Arabian realty. Since then, as best I can discern, the Arabs have become less delusional while the Israelis have developed indigestion. These developments led to the Oslo accords, which are now breaking down.

The current situation, then, is this: The Palestinians have a straightforward problem. They want to continue to live where they are living—if without the Jews, Allah be praised, but in any case. Their earthly power, which consists of stones and suicide bombs, is sufficient to make the Jews mad but insufficient to make them go away. So, “in any case” is their only viable option. The Israelis, as the currently unbeatable ruling power, have several options. They can accept the Palestinians as anomalous equals in a Jewish state. They can let the Palestinians establish their own state. They can allow them a limited measure of autonomy under Israeli suzerainty (this being the basis of the Oslo accords). They can try to maintain the status quo with the Palestinians as unruly inmates of an Israeli prison state. And finally, the Israelis can kill and terrorize a sufficient number of Palestinians so that the others will run away, leaving Israel to the Jews. The first three of these options are identified with the Israeli left and center, whose strongest leader was murdered out of power. The last two are associated with the right, whose weakest leader was then voted into power.

What’s going to happen? Both Israel and the PLO are, as you know, clients of the American empire. Ours being a conservative empire, right-wing options are more likely to be pursued than centrist or leftist ones. That means more gore and turmoil, which will drive more Arabs and Jews to emigrate. Since the empire ultimately takes care of its own in one way or another, I expect that in the years to come we’re going to have at least as many falafel joints and kosher delis as Vietnamese and Cuban restaurants here in the U.S.

Dear ITT Ideologist,

What are the amazing anomalies of present-day politics?

—M. Matalin & J. Carville, Washington, D.C.

Dear Sirs,

My personal favorite is the identification of left politics with prudery and censorship (or PC, for short). I was born into red diapers and grew up on the left. Culturally, that meant the vanguard and the avant-garde, free lunch and free love, Marx, Marcuse and marijuana. I was there in the early '60s when thick factions of us bailed out of the old left, not only because we knew (decades before the CIA) that the Soviets were losers, but also because we wanted to have fun on the new left. It's hardly surprising, then, that conservatives claim that we were the mold that rotted the nation's moral character. Yet at the same time, the yahoos also charge the left with being the instigators of PC. In other words, lefties get the rap for the country being both too loose and too uptight. (A pathetic variant of this is Bob Dole's charge that Bill Clinton is, at one and the same time, a sleazy opportunist and a dedicated liberal.)

Dear ITT Ideologist,

I was resting. Did you happen to catch the debates?

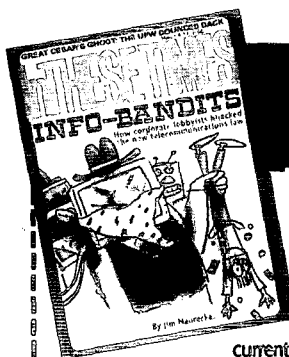
—R. Reagan, Bel Air, Calif.

Dear Mr. Reagan,

I did. And I agree with your premise that they were thrown. The presidential debate—or joint appearance, as it is now called by the few who still take the word “debate” literally—caused quite an insignificant ripple in Hartford, which is right up the road from me. A modest state capital with much to be modest about, Hartford needed a civic boost, what with the Whalers floundering and downtown as bleak as Captain Ahab's soul. But while even bad hockey produces good fights, the same cannot be said for the “debate.”

Things went from dull to dismal in St. Petersburg a few days later when Kemp and Gore went wonk to wonk. Quarterback Jack exercised his talent for packing the greatest number of words into the smallest possible idea, namely supply-side economics. This may be summed up as the belief that low-tax countries (like Somalia) are inherently more prosperous than high-tax ones (like Switzerland). And so Jack was easily sacked by Al Gore's slow drive down the yellow brick road of Clintonism.

Yes, I caught the “debates.” But I'll be cured by November 5.



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## IN THE END

# Taking the bull by the horns

By Pete Karman

Dear ITT Ideologist,  
Election day is nigh. Should I vote?  
—Fran Chize, Demopolis, Ala.

Dear Ms. Chize,  
If you're retro the answer is yes. But if you're hip it's no. The trend has been moving away from voting and toward polling for some years now. Anyone can vote but only the select get polled. Many don't mind being anyone, but some prefer being select.

In the political context, polling means the culling of opinion. But if you, like me, reside among agriculturalists, you will know that polling has a different definition when it comes to cattle. It means lopping off their horns, which renders them harmless to their herders. I like to think of electoral polling as designed to achieve the same purpose with citizens. The vote, after all, is a pointed and potentially dangerous weapon. It allows the civic-minded to make their own politics. The poll, like the veterinarian's hacksaw, blunts this pointedness by directing citizens to favor those politicians and propositions most likely to win rather than those they actually prefer. Since those most likely to win have been predetermined by the polltakers and their clients, polls obviate the need for voting. They take the politics out of elections,

which is like taking the ball out of baseball. Would you attend or televise a virtual baseball game in which players pretended to pitch, hit and catch a ball and the likely score was proleptically posted on the scoreboard?

If you are not among the polled select and haven't yet made up your mind about whether or not to vote, you might wish to consider my uncompromised position. I have voted in every presidential election since 1960, though never once for a winner or a favorite, let alone a lesser evil. I call it uncompromised because so far as I can tell, my voting record has done nothing to harm my country or disturb my sleep.

Dear ITT Ideologist,  
I was out having my tie and pocket hanky matched and missed the latest contretemps between Israel and its Palestinians. Could you clue me in?  
—W. Christopher, Foggy Bottom, D.C.

Dear Mr. Christopher,  
If you are a longtime reader, you will recall that I last addressed the Middle East "peace process" in July 1991, when I suggested that it consisted mainly of the Arab reverie of destroying Israel and the Israeli reality of accreting ever

*Continued on page 39*